The Sacred Tree

A Visual Investigation into the Tree as a Symbol of Life, Death and Regeneration.

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Signed statement of originality

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ABSTRACT

This research project is a visual investigation of 'the sacredness of nature' utilising the tree as a metaphor for the mystery of life, death and regeneration. The project developed into a journey through history, exploring ecological and spiritual concerns as well as personal issues of migration and adoption of a new country.

The project aims to create a contemplative experience through the use of a symbolic visual language. Combining an installation approach with drawing, I look at ways of expressing my relationship with my adopted country without losing my rich European cultural background. Drawing represents one of the earliest forms of image making and connects us in an unbroken line with the first human who drew in the dirt or on a wall in a cave.

In the work, I explore a variety of visual languages: figurative/narrative, referring to a traditional European perception of nature and the spiritual, combined with an abstract as well as a process-orientated language where the material is the signifier.

Within this context, the research examines the long tradition of artists using nature, the tree and the forest to express connection with the sacred. For many of these artists drawing has been of great importance to their practice. Precursors include, amongst many others, Caspar David Friedrich, John Glover, Anselm Kiefer, Wolfgang Laib, John Wolseley, Peter Booth and Kiki Smith. Contemporary theories relating to the subject underpin the project. Foremost have been: David Suzuki, Simon Schama, Robert Harrison-Pogue, David Tacey and Mircea Eliade .

The visual outcome of the project is a series of symbolic works which have been produced using materials from the trees: charcoal for drawings and installation work; dyes distilled from leaves; flowers and bark from trees to create works on paper and to dye wool. These works are installed in rooms and form connections with each other and with the space, evoking an atmosphere of contemplation. They reflect the diversity of life and its celebration as well as meditations upon death and regeneration.

Contents

CHAPTER I

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The image of the tree has been used since primordial times as a symbol of the connection between the earth and the heavens, the natural and the spiritual world.

The main objective of this research project, *The Sacred Tree,* has been to find a contemporary visual language in which the symbol of the tree is used to create works that evoke an atmosphere conducive to the contemplation of the mysteries of life, death and of regeneration.

Visual arts writer Anna Voigt describes the ways by which meanings and relationships have been expressed in countless forms of myth-making languages. These, through the use of visual symbols, metaphors, sound and ritual enactment, help us understand the importance of prehistoric cultural connections to the workings of universal laws in Nature: 'Symbol was connected to Nature, to cosmogony, to myth, to living tradition and experience'.[1] It is this line of thought that I have aimed to develop.

The research project also has aimed to create a unique view of the tree and its spiritual connections through the use of cross-cultural references and methodologies, as well as through exploring materials derived from trees to produce the artworks. I have endeavoured to combine ancient dyeing and traditional drawing techniques within a contemporary context.

My intention has been to identify contemporary artists whose work deals with concepts of nature and the spiritual, and to consider my personal European migrant background in relationship to the work. There are longstanding historical precedents of artists using the tree as a symbol for the veneration of nature. It has been my aim to inform my visual language through research into the mythology and historical background of the

[1] Voigt, Anna, *New visions, new perspectives: voices of contemporary Australian women artists*, Roseville East NSW: Craftsman House, 1996, p.13.

image of the sacred tree in European tradition, as well as the perception of the tree in colonial and contemporary Australia.

Since the Enlightenment, with its Cartesian mechanical view of the world, many humans living in urban environments have become alienated from the natural world, unable to value the life and beauty of nature because they are locked into their own egocentric perspectives and short-sighted needs. The survival of many life-forms is now at stake – a consequence of the impact of the modern industrial drive for unlimited economic growth and resource development. We must rethink the modern myth of progress.

Major challenges in this research have been how to combine European narrative pictorial conventions with an abstract visual language and how natural materials may be utilised as signifiers, within a unique symbolic language. A language which explores the notions of nature and its connection with the spiritual. To these ends I have produced a body of work that has developed from empirical studies of trees and narrative symbolic language. These studies have been realised through drawing, which at times I have combined with abstract arrangements. I have explored the use of materials directly derived from the tree itself. The resultant works speak of the life force and of the fragility of trees.

In the course of the making of the work I have aimed to explore the relationship between time, process and space. This has been an important element in the quest to create work of a contemplative nature. The ritual process of collecting leaves, flowers, charcoal, making marks on paper and spreading the charcoal and earth for the installations has a meditative, timeless quality. Drawing is one of our earliest experiences and can be used as a global visual language when verbal communication fails; it is part of our interrelationship with the physical environment, recording in and on it our very presence as humans.[2] Dyeing paper and wool by extracting the 'life-blood' from the tree materials imitates alchemical processes. I have explored the use of space through many trials and

[2] Dexter, Emma, *Vitamin D, new perspectives in drawing*, London, New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005, p.006.

exhibitions held over the last two years. Through this process a sense of the importance of the placement of works in relation to each other and within the space has become paramount.

I have explored theories regarding the interconnectedness and the sacredness of nature to provide the theoretical context of the research project; foremost amongst the writings are those of David Suzuki, Mircea Eliade, Simon Schama and David Tacey.

Through this work I intend to instil a greater awareness of the importance of trees and forests for the health of our planet and emphasise the interconnectedness of everything in nature - including us humans.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

1. Our Lady of the Oak

The work in this research project draws on memories of my childhood in Flanders; of endless afternoons of playing under oak and chestnut trees, collecting acorns, taking in the fragrance of autumn leaves; of walking with my parents in beech forests, the sun glimmering through the canopy. All over the Flanders countryside shrines are dotted along the way. They are often nailed to, or placed under a tree and form a connection to a distant past of nature worship, when Christianity was supplanting the nature goddesses with the Virgin Mary and other saints. The land is imbued with history, the earth soaked with blood. Close to the village where I was born are the battlefields of the Great War of 1914-1918, and the Battle of the Spurs of 1302.

My interest also stems from the stories my father often told me about the beautiful German forests he walked through when he was a prisoner of war during World War 2.

My parents moved several times across the language border[3] in Belgium. As an attempt to cope with these very upsetting events in my young life, I drew and painted. Later when I started my art education in Belgium, it was

[3] Belgium has three official languages and is geographically divided in three sections according to where the different languages are spoken.

fairly conventional. I studied sculpture in a traditional way, working with clay and plaster casts.
After years of travelling, it was when living in a small Cora Indian village in Mexico that I was first confronted by the sacred earth rites the Indians performed, a mixture of animism and Christianity. This experience made me think about my own Catholic background and relationship to the earth.

Eventually returning to Belgium at the end of 1978, I became aware of the increased loss of the natural environment. The part of Belgium from which I come has been transformed into a network of roads, highways and buildings. Many of the places of my childhood memories have been destroyed. The connection of the life of the local inhabitants with the rhythms of nature has been severely affected. This was the impetus for moving to, and the main reason for living in Tasmania, where I have spent the last 26 years. During this time I have taken an interest in Buddhism and the Green movement. My involvement with the Franklin blockade during the early eighties made me very concerned about the present destruction of some of the last remaining old growth forests in the world. Recently I have acquired a fairly large block of forest. Situated on a plateau and surrounded by bush on all sides, it is in a remote part of the country. Apart from a clearing around the small hut, the bush is fairly dense: it is no ‘Glover country’. The vegetation consists of several types of eucalyptus, tea tree, and dogwood. It is from this land that I have sourced a lot of the materials used in this project.

Drawing on these eclectic sources derived from my own experiences, I am looking for a visual symbolic language to explore the connection of the natural environment with the spiritual side of life and to voice my concern about the destruction of nature. This project also deals with memory and loss, and with the experience of adopting a new country in which to live. My interest lies in work of a contemplative nature; this factor and my European background have influenced my choice of artists in relation to this project.

PARAMETERS OF THE RESEARCH

For my conceptual, formal and technical context I have limited the choice of artists mainly to those coming from a European and Australian background. Although I am aware of a longstanding tradition of American artists and environmentalists dealing with nature and the spiritual, I have not touched on the works of the Transcendentalists or other historical precedents within the American context. Neither have I delved into the work of Australian aborigines, as this is beyond the scope of this project. However, I have looked at work of some contemporary American artists and have included the work of Kiki Smith within the context of the research.

Some artists whom I have included have drawn inspiration from spiritual ideas within Buddhism and other Eastern-inspired philosophies such as Theosophy, others from Catholicism or Calvinism. What draws these artists together is their shared reverence and concern for nature. For most of these artists, drawing has been an important part of their art practice, whether as a way to produce final works or, more traditionally, as a practice for exploring ideas for final works.

SIGNIFICANCE IN THE FIELD

Although there is an increasing and at times a desperate outcry about the state of our environment and the importance of trees for the health of our planet, little seems to be done to stop the onslaught of deforestation and loss of biodiversity.

In earlier times, and still in some cultures today, people believed that the whole world was animated; everything was alive and interconnected. Before the Enlightenment and its scientific view of the world, this idea of an animated earth and a sacred universe had existed for millennia. Interestingly, such ideas have, in recent times, received fresh impetus. For many people, they suggest a way to reconnect with our essential selves. In

such a worldview, death is appreciated as part of the continuum in the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Human beings are included in this totality of creation, participating in various ways in the creative mind of the living earth. This project is an attempt to focus the viewers' attention on these important issues and to develop visual imagery that creates a greater awareness of the importance of trees for the survival of our planet.

The subject of the tree has driven the research through the use of methodologies using materials from the tree as signifiers. The project combines representational imagery with abstract elements in order to create a unique symbolic language.

Through the influence of a lapsed Catholic European background and interest in eastern philosophy, merged with an acknowledgement of the sacredness of nature and connection with the Australian landscape, this research project brings a different and unique perception of the relationship we have with nature, and trees in particular.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Introduction

The context of this project is very broad and is influenced by investigations into art, history, religion and science. Conceptually, my work has primarily been informed by the works of David Suzuki and Mircea Eliade and by the Green movement. Formally, technically and also conceptually, works of many contemporary artists have been important in this project, particularly the work of Anselm Kiefer, Kiki Smith, John Wolseley, Peter Booth and Wolfgang Laib.

In Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts, Mircea Eliade talks about how originally all art was 'sacred',[4] and how it is through art that the invisible is represented by means of the visible. Contemporary man often declares himself a-religious and completely rid of the sacred. According to Eliade, however, within contemporary culture the sacred survives in the unconscious, and this participation in the sacred happens through dreams and daydreams, or through attitudes like our love for nature.[5] I would add that this could also happen through the contemplation of artworks.

As humans we have always pondered our relationship with life, the earth and the universe. In the past, however, when we lived in a more natural environment, closer to the changes of the seasons, people understood that they depended on nature and shared a kinship not only with animals but also with all vegetation. In his book *Tree, a biography*, David Suzuki relates how the introduction of a more scientific way of perceiving the world, with its focus on fragments of nature, has given scientists profound insights into these fragments. However, this process of fragmentation has resulted in a loss of sight of the context of these fragments and the cycles

[4] Eliade, Mircea, Apostolas Cappadona, Diane, *Symbolism, the sacred and the arts*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986, p.55.
[5] Ibid., p.82.

and rhythms in which they exist. Through his book, Suzuki wants to restore the layperson's sense of wonder, and tell the story of a Douglas-fir tree in order to connect the reader to other times and the story of life.[6] Through my research project I also aim to tap into that sense of wonder and share this with the viewer of my work.

As the project evolved, I used drawing extensively to explore my ideas. With its primitive origin as the earliest form of mark making, drawing has traditionally been regarded as an essential part of training for artists. The most basic tool for thinking through, and preparing in advance completed paintings or sculptures, it is a process long acknowledged as the foundation of many creative practices.

The symbol of the tree


2. Tree symbol

Trees, the largest living things on earth, have a special place in our lives and are among our most potent symbols. Some live for several hundreds of years, their life spanning many generations of man. They represent vital energy, life, regeneration and the cosmos.

Trees purify the air we breathe. With their unique plumbing system they transport water from the ground to the crown, and with their branches reaching up into the sky, and their roots deep down into dark mother earth, they connect the earth both with the heavens and the underworld. Almost every culture has a tree at the core of its mythology.

The most universal image of the tree is that of the Cosmic Tree, situated in the centre of the universe.[7] Around this still centre the movement of creation revolves.

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[6] Suzuki, David & Grady, Wayne, *Tree, a biography*, Australia: Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2005, p.7.
[7] Eliade, Mircea, *Images and symbols: studies in religious symbolism*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969, p.44.

The oak was revered by the Celts and Germans and is strongly associated with the Druids. The ash is Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree of Scandinavian mythology. Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree to receive enlightenment. To the shaman, climbing the tree was a metaphor for the shamanic journey from one realm to the other. [8]

The most popular surviving custom is the decoration of the Christmas tree, which traditionally is a fir tree whose needles symbolise immortality. Originally from Germany, this midwinter custom stems from decorating the houses with greenery, a reminder of the coming of spring and the coming of new life to the land.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Europe: Divine Nature and Images of Contemplation.

When immense primeval forests covered most of the pre-historical landscape and majestic trees soared above their inhabitants, it was normal to revere the spirits that dwelt within them. The whole wilderness was part of a single living metaphor and tree cults were very prolific in pagan Europe.

During the first century AD, the Romans, Pliny and Tacitus, described the immense and dense ancient Hercynian forest. Pliny wrote, with a mixture of admiration and revulsion, of how the Germans venerated divinities that were lodged within natural phenomena like oaks, and that this worship was practised in open holy groves. They considered it degrading to confine worship within masonry walls. Pliny and, later, Velleuis give accounts of

[8] The shaman uses ritual techniques that often employ drama, dance, sound and song to induce an altered state of consciousness. During this inner journey, the shaman is believed to leave her/his body and travel to the underworld and overworld – Earth being the middle world - contacting and interacting with the spirits and beings of Nature. To the shaman, the practice of 'art' forms was a 'means' not an 'end'. Voigt, Anna, *New Visions – New Perspectives: Voices of Contemporary Australian Women Artists*, Roseville East NSW, Australia: Craftsman House, 1996, p.24.

the battle in the Teutoburg forest in 9 A.D., in which the Germans were victorious. This victory was to inspire the Germans for centuries to come.[9] When the invasion of the Romans moved to the North, so did their contempt for the Druids and their sacred groves of 'murmuring leaves'.[10] The systematic destruction of endemic species of trees began. Slowly, Celtic religion became assimilated with the Roman/Christian religion, though countless Christian missionaries still preached for the destruction of the holy groves and trees.

3. *Green man*

4. *Verdant Cross*

However, the true spirit of nature worship never died. The Green Men - pagan fertility symbols - became intruders in the churches; from vaults and pillars their grin was spewing greenery into the house of Christ. The tree became Christ's cross and the cross became the Tree of Life, which stands at the centre of the Garden of Eden.

During the late Middle Ages, the Gothic cathedrals, especially in Germany, became the sacred groves, their nave resembling an alley of trees, the embodiment of the forest. In 1772, Goethe[11] wrote his famous lines directed to a new generation of Gothic architects:

> Multiply, pierce the huge walls which you are to raise against the sky so that they shall ascend, like sublime, overspreading trees of God, whose thousand branches, millions of twigs and leaves…. Announce the beauty of the Lord, their master.[12]

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[9] Schama, Simon, *Landscape and memory*, London: Fontana Press, 1996, pp.83-89.
[10] Schama, Simon, 1996, Ibid., p.95.
[11] Goethe (1749-1832)
[12] Schama, Simon, 1996, Ibid., p.237.

5. *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Cathedral*, Antwerpen, Belgium

6. *Sainte-Chapelle*, Paris

The long process through which ancient Celtic and Germanic pagan groves became fully converted to Christian use developed, in the 16th and 17th centuries a real cult of rustic pilgrimage marked by wayside chapels. Those shrines often held images of the Madonna. Mary, with her fruitful virginity, was replacing the fertility goddess, Freya. Her shrine was hung on a sacred tree; sometimes Mary herself was made out of its wood.[13] In fact, the Maria cult became so strong that in some places such as in the German town of Regensburg, there are accounts of religious hysteria surrounding the cult.[14]

7. *Shrine, Belgium*

[13] Malbert, Roger, *The Tree of Life: new images of ancient symbol*, London: South Bank Centre, 1989, p.23.
[14] Janzen, Reinhild, *Albrecht Altdorfer: four centuries of criticism*, UMI Michigan, Research Press, 1980, p.11.

Albrecht Altdorfer (Circa 1480- 1538)

Living in Regensburg, Albrecht Altdorfer is widely acknowledged as the first artist who painted independent landscapes.[15] In his work, he preserved an image of an earlier animated cosmos, infused with a divine spirit. His work is also closely related to the entanglement of Germanic culture with its love for the primeval Hercynian forest. This forest came to stand for all what was distinctive about Germany and became the source of various Teutonic strengths. The German forest had been spared from the axe, mainly as a result of the country's social and economic retardation and the lack of the voracious demands for naval timber, which in the eighteenth century claimed whole regions of France and England.[16]

In the painting *St George and the Dragon*, every detail in the trees is recorded stylistically and as faithfully as the saint and his beast. Here we see the landscape not as a backdrop for a religious painting; rather the whole picture plane is dominated by forest. The trees, with their interlacing branches, are overpowering the small figures of St George and the dragon. The figures look almost incidental within the picture. The lush forest, full of life, becomes the main theme of the painting, a sanctuary almost like a cave, from which the rest of the world is viewed.

8. Albrecht Altdorfer,
St George and the Dragon

From the Enlightenment to a Romantic View of Nature

With its highpoint in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment professed a belief in social progress and the liberation of mankind through science. Purpose, reason, and man's dominance over nature became the new order. Religion was seen as superstition. Descartes,[17] who can be called the father

[15] Before Altdorfer, subjects of paintings through the history of European art, consisted of figures, narratives, or portraits, which sometimes had landscapes in the background. Wood, Christofer S., *Albrecht Altdorfer*, London, Reaktion Books Ltd, 1993, p.7.
[16] Schama, Simon, *Landscape and memory*, London: Fontana Press, 1996, p.114.
[17] Descartes (1596-1650)

of the Enlightenment, redefines his relation not only to tradition but also to nature in its totality.[18] In the Age of Enlightenment the forest is considered in utilitarian terms: for its 'usefulness'. It is seen as a commodity, a useful source of revenue and taxation. These considerations soon dominated the entire European enterprise of forest management by state and private owners.[19]

The Romantic view of the organic nature of man's psychic life and imagination was a reaction against the mechanical view, which was prevalent during the Enlightenment. The Romantic spirit filled the void left by the decline of Christianity as a major power in Europe. It filled it with the divinity of nature and the unity of the cosmos. Also during the Romantic era, drawing became freed from its role as a rigid repository of traditions and rules. With its inherent qualities of immediacy and intimacy, drawing was the most suitable medium for artists, such as Delacroix, to express ideas of freedom and dissent, fear and desire. According to Emma Dexter, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Tate Modern, there is currently a renewed interest among young artists in the idealism of Romanticism, and its evidence can be found not only in the exploration of the sublime but also in explorations of national identity, mysticism, myth and legend.[20]

In French Romantic painting, emotion is expressed through the metaphor of the human body. Their Northern Romantic contemporaries, however, used scenes of nature to refer to human passions. Some of those painters, like the leading German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich, were on a spiritual quest and strove to go beyond surface appearances and to penetrate the hidden realms of the universe. They searched for symbolic rather than descriptive values.[21]

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[18] Pogue Harrison, Robert, *Forests: the shadow of civilisation*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.107.
[19] Ibid., p120.
[20] Dexter, Emma, [introduction], *Vitamin D, new perspectives in drawing*, London, New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005, p.9.
[21] Sala, Charles, *Caspar David Friedrich, the Spirit of Romantic Painting*, Paris: Finest S.A., Editions Pierre Terail, Paris, 1994, p.46.

Images of Contemplation, Caspar David Friedrich

9. Friedrich, *Lone Tree*

10. Friedrich, *Winter Landscape with Church.*

.Caspar David Friedrich[22] (1774 -1840) was born in Germany three centuries after Altdorpher. He used nature, which he considered to be a manifestation of the invisible, in a symbolic way. He looked inward and transformed nature into a world charged with the spiritual. Friedrich painted the slow process of growth, the cycle of flowering and wilting. Around 1810, after years of great efforts, he reached the radical conclusion that - faced with the overwhelming power of nature - the only option for the mere mortal was meditation.

Friedrich's *Winter Landscape with Church*, like many of his works, evokes a deep silence and a sense of mystical power. In the foreground of the picture we see, standing in the death of winter, one very large and some smaller evergreen trees. They are symbols of eternal life. The large tree is overpowering and almost embraces the Christ on the cross. The Gothic church in the background is floating in a haze. Its spires are rising like the trees into the all-infusing divine light. This is a picture of renewal. As a symbol of hope and regeneration we see the grass that is starting to sprout through the snow. The artist has used elements of nature, trees, grass, snow and sky as metaphors for the supernatural and to elucidate a transcendental experience.

[22] Friedrich was brought up as a Protestant. The most important influences on his work were the philosophical ideas from Schelling: '… lying hidden beneath the surface appearance of nature is a spirituality waiting to be revealed by the painter and the poet.' Sala, Charles, 1994, Ibid., p.77.

Modern Art, Mondrian and the Development of Geometric Abstraction.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, modernity overthrew traditional authority of state and church. The advent of photography to record reality and the increasing secularisation and industrialisation of the world around them gave artists the impetus to investigate spirituality. As the avant-garde lost interest in traditional religious imagery, the pioneers of Modern Art, such as Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, started to delve in the esoteric and the spiritual dimensions of life.

Several organizations, such as the Theosophical Society,[23] with its offshoots of Christosophie and the Antroposophical Society[24], were influenced by Eastern philosophies and were investigating spirituality and the occult. The Theosophical Society, in particular, influenced many artists, Piet Mondrian was one of its most dedicated adherents.[25]

Mondrian moved to Paris in 1911, and there he came into contact with the Cubist artists. He seriously tried to adapt to this new wave of painting while still keeping to his fundamental ambition to unite his art and philosophy, both of which he saw as a means to transcend matter. Unlike most Cubist painters, who were more interested in still life, his works include many studies of nature, especially of water and trees. He seemed to have an attraction to the subject of the tree, with its pictorial problems of interpenetrating branches, the verticality of the trunk combined with the horizontality of its branches. The numerous drawings and paintings helped

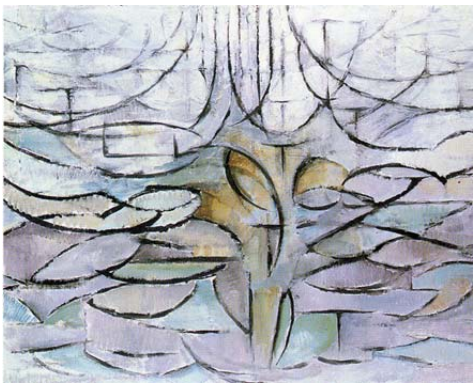
[23] By the time of its founder's (H.P. Blavatsky) death in 1891, the esoteric teachings of the Theosophical Society and other related movements had already so influenced artistic circles that they were beginning to reinstate spiritual enlightenment as a valid function of art. It was open to new scientific developments such as psychology and Darwin's theory of evolution. According to Blavatsky 'Darwin's only essential mistake was to substitute matter for spirit as the motivating force in the universe…' Regier, Kathleen J., Welsh, Robert P., *The Spiritual Image in Modern Art*, 1987, U.S.A., A Quest original, First Edition the Theosophical Publishing House, p.174.

[24] Schoenmakers founded Christosophie, and Rudolf Steiner founded the Antroposophical Society. Both were initially Theosophists and their teachings were influenced by Theosophy.

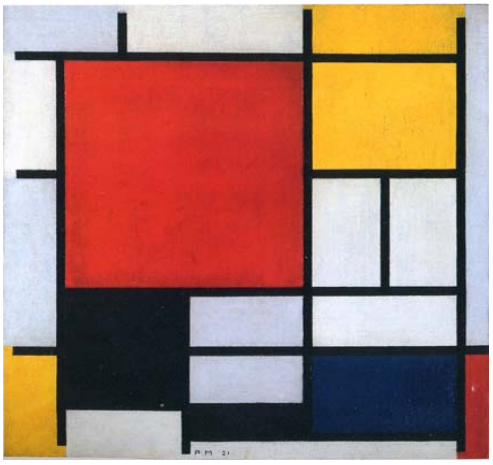
[25] Freeman, Judy, "Chronologies: artists and the Spiritual" in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract painting 1890-1985*, New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1986, p.410.

him to develop successive stages of abstraction, which eventually led him to his grid patterns. He regarded the tree as the symbol of the polarities of life, matter and spirit, and of balance in nature. For Mondrian, the primary goal of abstract painting was to make a universal truth perceivable, and in this way make it possible to contemplate it in plastic form.[26]

11. Mondrian, *The Grey Tree*



12. *Apple Tree in Flower*



13. *Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue and Black*

The control and the structure of Mondrian's works, which enhance a sense of contemplation, has been influential in some of Peter Booth's and Wolfgang Laib's works and has also to some degree influenced my own research. I have used abstract forms but I have infused them with matter (charcoal and dyes), which I have used as a metaphor. Through this, my work seeks to reflect the interdependence of matter and spirit.

[26] Cheetham, Mark A., *The rhetoric of purity: essentialist theory and then advent of abstract painting*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.40.

Australia: Trees in the Colonies

The First Fleet sailed in 1787 from Portsmouth in England under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip. Not only did the fleet carry convicts and crew but also contained livestock. Captain Phillip's instructions were to preserve this livestock so that they could become the basis for the colony's new herds. He had no such instruction concerning the preservation of Australia's native flora and fauna. When granting land, the instructions were only for the preservation of trees for naval purposes. In this way the Crown could enjoy exclusive right to exploit trees while showing no interest in protecting them.[27]

The initial reaction to the environment of the new country was quite favourable. On reaching Port Jackson, both surgeons, George Worgan and Arthur Bowes, delighted in the stately evergreen Eucalypts, which, according to them, could be compared to any tree in England.

As in other New World colonies, the first settlers were keen to claim the land, and clearing the land of trees as soon as possible was the way to stake these claims. This eradication was a difficult task and happened mostly indiscriminately.

So initial delight in the Eucalypt and other native trees, expressed by the first arrivals, soon changed to contempt by the settlers who had the task of clearing the land. As time passed, a strong longing for the changing of seasons marked by the falling of leaves crept in. The settlers yearned for the thrill of seeing the brilliant first spring green and the expression of earth's fecundity and a feeling of boredom crept in. Many of them found it hard to bond with the land; they still called England home. Although different species of Eucalypt had been identified, to many of the newcomers they all seemed the same; the forests seemed gloomy, desolate and uninteresting. The trees did not appeal to their eye that looked for

[27] Bonyhady, Tim, *The colonial earth*, Carlton South, Victoria, Australia, Melbourne University Press, 2002, p.70.

greater variety in the landscape. The Eucalypt did not fit the ideal of the picturesque.

So great was the loathing for the gum tree that by the time commissioner Thomas Bigge arrived in Sydney in 1819, he twisted 'evergreen 'into 'everbrown.'[28] The ravages of the axe were to be seen everywhere the invaders ventured. Trees were being cleared to such an extent that, by 1824, Edward Curr lamented that Tasmanian farms were 'studded over with large stumps of trees…impressing the mind with the painful sensation of incommodiousness and half civilization'.[29]

Church professionals, who were mostly associated with the colonialist project, emphasised the universal mission of the church and greatly ignored the spirit of the place.[30] In Australia during the early nineteenth century, with the hardships of settlement, and the forests unlike those of England, (and not yet destroyed for naval purposes) often the reverse of the nature-adulation in English Romanticism existed: many colonists despised nature. As Australian writer David Tacey states in his book *Edge of the Sacred*: '"Mother Nature" did not attend and care for her children, but rather the Terrible Mother of mythological imagination tended to impress itself upon our experiences of the earth and the natural elements'.[31] The 'bush' was seen as hostile and dreary.

However, although the conservation movement (in white society) only began to gather momentum in the late 1960s, its roots go back almost to the first years of white settlement. The argument for the conservation of the landscape was often based on aesthetic grounds. For instance in her Notes and Sketches of New South Wales (1844),[32] Louisa Ann Meridith lamented about the dreary vegetation still being far preferable than the

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[28] Although never put into print by the commissioner, the term passed into common usage, Bonyhady, Tim, Ibid., p.72.
[29] Bonyhady, Tim, 2002, Ibid., p.86.
[30] Tacey, David J., *Edge of the sacred: transformation in Australia*, Blackburn North Victoria: Harper Collins, 1995, p.197.
[31] Tacey, David J., 1995, Ibid., p.62.
[32] Catalano, Gary, *An intimate Australia, the landscape & recent Australian art*, Sydney, NSW: Hale & Iremonger Pty Limited, 1985, p.50.

'bare, raw, ugly' world of clearings, One of the first influential conservationists was the botanist Ferdinand von Mueller, who called for protection of the forest and especially of the giant mountain ash.[33] He talked about nature's ability to repair souls and identified the wilderness with God from whence everything stems.

There are parallels to be drawn from what Mueller stood for and the concerns of modern conservationists, who plead for the protection of old growth forests and the importance of biodiversity for the well-being of mankind and the planet.

John Glover (1767-1849)

Glover's art - especially his oil paintings - are quite different from those of his contemporaries. What appeals to me is his life story as an older migrant from England and his idiosyncratic way of using translucent layers of paint, producing brilliant light.

In 1831, the sixty-three year old Glover arrived in Van Diemen's Land. Delighted and full of enthusiasm for the new country, he explored his surroundings by quickly executing a large body of drawings, many of which were of gum trees. His thousands of drawings in the forty-odd surviving bound books and the countless loose or cut sheets are considered '… the most substantial visual record by one hand of Europe and Australia in the pre-photographic age.'[34] His enthusiasm for the gum tree, with its twisting branches, had so far been unmatched by any of the painters in Australia before him.

Colonial Auditor Boyes, in a letter to his wife, commented on Glover's response to the Tasmanian environment and his attitude to nature:

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[33] Bonyhady, Tim, *The colonial earth*, Carlton South, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2002, pp. 256-258.

[34] Max Stapels, "Sunshine and shadow; the Glover sketchbooks", in David Hansen, *John Glover and the colonial picturesque*, Australia, Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Art Exhibitions Australia, 2003, p.250.

> He [Glover] is delighted with this country, …in looking at Nature's works he seems to penetrate into futurity and carries as it were, his sentiment of landscape beauty beyond the Grave. He really looks through Nature up to Nature's God…[35]

Corroboree of Natives in Van Diemen's Land (1846), his last known watercolour, is one of his darkest and most mysterious works. It evokes a time when Aborigines were still living happily in their surroundings, and suggests a mystical experience of nature.

The moon, a symbol of the passing of time since primeval times, lights up the trees. In between them dance aborigines. One can almost feel the primitive joy of a fertility dance, a celebration of the nature gods and goddesses, a dance for life. It reminds me of the time I was living in a small village of the Cora Indians in the mountains in Mexico, when I was fortunate to be able to watch one of their celebrations. At Easter they held their yearly initiation ceremonies, which included primitive fertility dances during the night. In these parts of the world the connection with the land is still expressed in a physical way. Perhaps it could also resemble a ceremony that took place in the times of the Druids in Europe.

14. John. Glover, *Corroboree of Natives in Van Diemen's Land,*

15. John Glover, *Swilker Oak, 1840*

On visiting the Glover exhibition in Hobart in 2003, it was the *Swilker Oak* painting which struck me most.

The Swilker Oak in Needwood Forest, Staffordshire, was one of England's most celebrated trees during the late eighteenth century. Glover was inspired by this majestic tree and in 1790 drew it in his sketchbook. It took

[35] Hansen, David, *John Glover and the colonial picturesque*, Australia, Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Art Exhibitions Australia, 2003, p.90.

him, however, until 1840, fifty years after he made the drawing, when he was 73 years old and living on the other side of the world, to paint this oak. The rendering of the brilliant Tasmanian light and extreme detail make it a peculiar painting: this setting seems more Australian than English, reflecting a blending of cultures.

Glover painted several European scenes in Tasmania. Was it a nostalgic longing for his home country towards the end of his life that made him turn back to this old English oak, or a desire for longevity?

There is a parallel in Glover's life and art to some other migrant artists I have researched. After many years in Australia, there is a looking back at our roots and an urge to produce work relating to those roots and a desire to come to terms with being a person with a split cultural background.

The Sacred in Australian Art

By the 1870s - and after the gold rushes and the cessation of transportation - native-born Australians[36] outnumbered new arrivals. To them Australia was their permanent home and people started taking pride in their natural surroundings. Romantic ideas filtered down to the new country and celebrated the relatively untouched landscape with its majestic trees. It was the time Eugene Von Guérard[37] painted many images of the wilderness as the true cathedrals of Australia. In an 1871 lecture, his contemporary, botanist Ferdinand von Mueller[38] comments:

> The silent grandeur and solitude of a virgin forest inspires us almost with awe, much more so than even the broad expanse of ocean. It conveys also involuntary to our mind a feeling as if we were brought more closely before the Divine Power by whom the worlds without end were created, and before whom the proudest human work must sink into utter insignificance. [39]

[36] Native born of migrant descent.
[37] Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901)
[38] Ferdinad von Mueller: writer, botanist. Born in Germany 1825, died in Melbourne 1896.
[39] Catalano, Gary, *An intimate Australia: the landscape & recent Australian art*, Sydney, NSW: Hale & Iremonger Pty Limited, 1985, p.52.

16. Hans Heysen, *Summer*,.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, when Australia became a federation, the culture of the bush developed into a national culture and enforced great national pride. It also reinforced a kind of spiritual participation in the landscape.[40] The artist who adopted the gum tree more then anyone, as his special and central subject, was Hans Heysen.[41]
He imbued his work with a divine light, and was perhaps the first painter who captured distinguishing features of the specific species of eucalypts.

The ideas and influence of Modernism came to Australia mainly after the First World War; the Theosophical Society also became quite influential amongst some artists in Australia. Other organizations such as the Anthroposophical Society, the Fourth Dimension, Zen Buddhism and others allied to Eastern philosophy have influenced followers at different times. Regarding these organizations, Nick Waterlow wrote in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Spirit and Place, Art in Australia 1961-1990*:

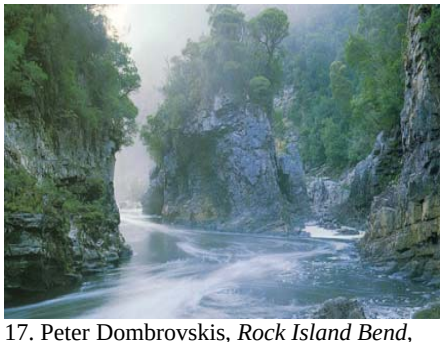
> ’One of the main things they all have in common, which is also at the heart of tribal Aboriginal art, is an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world and its beings.’[42]

[40] Radford, Ron, *Our country, Australian federation landscapes 1900-1914,* Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2001, p.34.
[41] Hans Heysen (1877- 1996)
[42] Waterlow, Nick OAM, in “Numinous Worlds”, *Spirit and place, art in Australia 1961-1990,* (catalogue) Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1991, p. 36.

Olegas Truchanas, Peter Dombrovskis and the Advent of the Green Movement

Olegas Truchanas, [43] the well-known Tasmanian wilderness photographer and conservationist, was instrumental in the 1960s campaign against the damming of Lake Pedder. Although the campaign was unsuccessful, it brought together many likeminded people who were concerned for the protection of the environment and the sensible management of resources. They formed green groups and in 1972 formed the United Tasmania Group political party, to campaign against the flooding of Lake Pedder. The United Tasmania Group, which later changed its name to the Tasmanian Greens, was the first Green political party in the world.

Truchanas' protégé was Peter Dombrovskis,[44] whose photographs owe much to the nineteenth century tradition of the sublime. He used his wilderness photographs as a metaphor for the sacred and the mystery of creation. His most well-known photograph, *Rock Island Bend*, was used politically to stop the damming of the Franklin River.



17. Peter Dombrovskis, *Rock Island Bend*,

The influence of the environmental movement has since spread rapidly and Green parties have been formed in countries all over the world. One of the issues they are dealing with is the protection of old growth forests. However, it deeply concerns me that materialism and consumerism seem to have taken much larger steps, spreading around the globe, and are greatly outpacing care for our environment.

[43] Olega Truchanas (1923 - 1971)
[44] Peter, Dombrovskis (1945 - 1996)

THE SACRED, NATURE AND THE TREE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Biologist E.O.Wilson has observed:

> '…the loss of forests during the past half-century is one of the most profound environmental changes in the history of the planet'.[45]

This loss of forest, which already started when human beings invented stone tools, has, especially in recent decades, escalated to a worrying degree. According to David Tacey:

> Only by remaking and restoring the sacred can we achieve individual and collective health, since the sacred stands at the very heart of humanity, and if it is repressed or ignored humanity must suffer the consequences[46]

Like many of their predecessors, contemporary artists are using their art to express their relationship with nature and spirituality.

During the course of this research I have looked at works from a wide range of contemporary artists, including Fiona Hall, Jill Orr, David Nash, Janet Lawrence, Guiseppe Penome, Ugo Rondinone, Rosalie Gascoigne and many more. However, it is works of Anselm Kiefer, Wolfgang Laib, John Wolseley, Peter Booth and Kiki Smith that I consider having been most valuable for the creation of my work.

Ideas regarding nature and the spiritual underpin the theoretical context of this research project. They touch on the contemporary writings of David Suzuki, Simon Schama, Robert Harrison Pogue and Mircea Eliade and also the work of Joseph Beuys.

History and the Material World

Joseph Beuys (Germany, 1951-1986)

Beuys was one of the twentieth century artists who, through his ideas about the integration of art and politics, influenced artists all over the

[45] Suzuki, David, Grady Wayne, *Tree: a biography*, Australia, Allen and Unwin, 2005, p.169.
[46] Tacey, David J., *Edge of the sacred: transformation in Australia*, Blackburn North Victoria: Harper Collins, 1995, p.1.

world. Like Mondrian he was influenced by Rudolf Steiner's philosophy,[47] a line of thought regarding man's place in the world that proceeds from Goethe, Hegel, Novalis, Schiller to Steiner himself.

Beuys grew up in a rural part of Germany and learned from a young age about the landscape where he lived. He saw the role of the artist as that of social activist. Although he used a great variety of materials and subjects in his art, he gave great importance to trees, incorporating in his works live trees as well as parts of plants such as leaves and juice. He was the co-founder of the Green political party in Germany; his concept of art practice extended into all parts of his life. Beuys' meditative and ritualistic performances relate to his interests in shamanic practices[48] and Tantric Buddhist philosophy. He believed in the connection between art, creativity and the spiritual side of life. Beuys was also interested in science. He was concerned with exploring the forces of nature and the mysteries of life and death.



18 & 19. Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks*, 1998.

Beuys started the ambitious project *Seven Thousand Oaks* in 1982, when he planted the first trees next to basalt stone markers. This was his contribution to 'Documenta 7' in Kassel, as a concept of a growing piece

[47] Beuys first read Steiner when he was a soldier during the WW2, as discussed in: Wijers, Louwrien, *Writing as sculpture 1978-1987,* London: Academy Group ltd, 1996, p.53.

[48] The work of the primal shaman is about retrieval of ancient and forgotten knowledge; about cosmic energy patterns; about retrieval of the lost soul; about locating dis-ease and healing the individual and the tribe/community – it is about how to walk in balance on the Earth in harmony with the cosmos and to know our place in the universe. (Voigt, Anna, *New visions, new perspectives: voices of contemporary Australian women artists*, Roseville East NSW: Craftsman House, 1996, p. 27.)

of art, which is symbolically in communication with nature. Ironically, this work was completed by his son Wensel after Beuys' death.

Beuys tried to make us see that, by gaining in materialism and increasing intellectualism, we have lost our intuition and closeness to nature and our connection with mother earth. Beuys used fat and butter to emphasise the importance of transformation and change. He explained:

> …. It is the transformation of substance that is my concern in art….My idea is to stress the transformation of substance, and substance for me includes all evolutionary power.[49]

Beuys concern for nature and his participation in the Green movement relate to my work, as does the materiality of the substances he uses. These relate to my use of charcoal as a metaphor for death, as well as for fire and regeneration, and the use of dyes extracted from the trees as a metaphor for the forest.

Anselm Kiefer (Lives in France, born in Germany, 1945)

My interest in Kiefer relates very much to his works dealing with Mondrian's abstraction and with Teutonic myth. I am also interested in his use of the layering of meanings and materials. Kiefer brings the sacred and the divine back through the use of symbols. He uses materials as if they are relics.

Like many post-modern artists Kiefer utilizes a variety of media. He uses photographic and print media; he paints or sculpts, uses found ready-made materials and combines them with organic ones. He produces very large drawings as well as small images, creates books and sculptural installations. In many of his highly textured works he layers materials as he layers their meanings. He combines traditional with non-traditional art materials such as straw and seeds. He creates imaginary space through realistic, narrative representation. My way of working relates to his eclecticism.

[49] Wijers, Louwrien, 1996, Ibid., p.153.

Kiefer's iconography deals with memory, German culture and history, with life and with death. The memory he deals with stems not from his personal recollections, but from a cultural memory, which he only knows second-hand and which has been built up over the years. His early works were directly inspired by Germany's Nazi history and its misappropriation of the Teutonic myth. [50] But it is not so much Nazism itself which is the subject of the greater part of his work, but the search for German identity. He combines with great skill his interests in nature with those of mythology and history. He uses the landscape to create different layers of meaning. The *WALD* (forest) plays an essential role in Germanic mythology and in the traditional concept of German national identity. For Kiefer the *WALD* is one of his symbols.

Teutoburg Forest:

The Teutoburg forest, where the battle of the German hordes led by Arminius[51] defeated three Roman legions[52] commanded by Varus in 9 A.D., is of particular interest to me. It plays a large role in the mythology of Germany and also in my own imagination. Initially, the Teutoburg Forest only lurked as an imagined forest in my mind. I had no name for it. As a small child, I could see tall trees in my imagination; hear the wind howling and the creaking snow that glimmered through the trees. My father had often told me stories about his experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany, and described the woods through which he had walked from the prison to the farm where he worked. Although he was a prisoner and experienced appalling conditions, I always sensed he had a great love for that forest. When I was about 11 years old, I recall visiting, with my family, the place in Germany where my father had spent time as a prisoner

[50] It is interesting to note that in the 21st century, the misappropriation of the German myth even rears its ugly head in the Australian Senate. On Tuesday the 28th of October 2003, Liberal Senator Brandis misquoted the work of Professor Staudenmaier's book *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, and according to Senator Faulker made a 20 minute argument '…that Senator Bob Brown and Senator Nettle are not representatives of the Australian Greens in the chamber, but really underneath it all that they are Nazis. Tuesday, 28 October 2003, Senate, 17003, www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/daylies/ds28003.pdf

[51] Arminius was the Roman name for Hermann.

[52] These three legions made up one quarter of the total Roman army.

and forced labourer. We walked through those same vast woods and we observed the camps of the soldiers on the East German side of the border hidden in the forest. One afternoon, when I had already started working on this research project and my mother was visiting from Belgium, I was looking at a map of Germany. To my surprise I found the name Teutoburg on the map and mentioned it to my mother, who said that this was the place where my father had been during the war. I had no idea that as a child I had actually been in this famous forest Friedrich and Kiefer had painted and that this place was one of the motivators for this project.

Varus, 1976

Kiefer completed many paintings relating to the battle in the Teutoburg forest. One I will discuss is Varus. The names incorporated as part of the imagery in this work refer to the battle in the forest. Since the Renaissance, and especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the battle of the Teutoburg forest had been a symbol of German identity and unity. The slow progress towards unity of the Germanic tribes only served to enhance the mystique of the primeval forest. It juxtaposed the purity of the German *Kultur*, and its (supposed) Wotanic[53] nature with the perceived corruption of more southerly civilizations.

In this large canvas, we see a dense forest of fir trees surrounding a snow-covered path. As in many of his paintings, Kiefer uses a centred deep perspective to draw us in. We don't know where the path is leading us, there seems to be no way out, only deeper into the forest and the unknown. The work exudes a feeling of still coldness, of death.

[53] Wotan, the supreme god and father, is the Teutonic counterpart of the Scandinavian god Odin, who for nine days and nights hung from the Cosmic Tree.
For more information on the controversial influence of paganism in Germany see Jones, Prudence & Pennick, Nigel, *A history of pagan Europe*, London: Routledge, 1995,p 218.

20 ,Above : Anselm Kiefer, Varus,

21. Left: Anselm Kiefer, *Piet Mondrian: Arminius' Battle*

***Piet Mondrian: Arminius' Battle,* 1976**

While Mondrian's art moved in successive stages through the use of tree images and water motifs, from representation to abstraction, Kiefer regresses Mondrian's geometric abstractions back to its representational elements. I will discuss Kiefer's large painting *Piet Mondrian: Arminius' Battle*, in relation to this.

In this painting Kiefer connects the battle in the Teutoburg forest, an event which symbolises a central moment in the development of the German identity, with Mondrian's development of geometric abstraction, a central moment in the history of modern art. Kiefer's painting presents an image of tension between representational and abstract art. Abstraction can be seen as a systematic repression of the figurative image in Western Art, and in its own way, it became dogmatic. In the centre of this painting we see a section of the trunk of a large fir, similar to many of Kiefer's trees in paintings dealing with the Teutoburg forest. This tree could be a portrait of the cosmic tree of life, the Axis Mundi.[54] It is an image that is recurrent in Kiefer's work. Horizontal branches intersect the vertical trunk, but there are also a few branches that seem to be uncontrollably reaching upwards or

[54] *Axis Mundi:* the tree at the centre of the world.

downwards. Could it perhaps symbolise the fact that abstraction never wholly controlled the art world? Part of the trunk is covered by white rectangles, representing snow. In the top section of the painting we see a grid, typical of Mondrian's work, overlapping the tree trunk; areas of grey recede into the background. There seems to be a silent battle going on between the tree and the grid, each one wanting to come to the foreground.

This work of Kiefer is very relevant to my work in relation to this research project. I am also dealing with narrative and abstract language, but rather than showing them in conflict I aim to combine them as two languages that complement each other. In my work I have attempted to combine historical myth with a contemporary view of the forest and narrative images with abstraction, such as in *Resting Place*.

Man laying with branch and ***Untitled, 1996***

22. *Man laying with branch*

These two works are of interest me as they symbolise death and regeneration. In *Man laying with branch*, from 1971, we see the artist lying down; a branch is emerging from his body, the picture looks very bleak, and the branch dead. This in contrast with *Untitled* from 1996, where the fecundity of nature is portrayed by the sunflower rising full of energy, its seeds dispersing themselves all over the picture plane. Kiefer has, over the years, used the motif of plants rising, out of the body in several of his works. They remind us of the Tree of Jesse,[55] and the alchemical images of rebirth after death: regeneration. The sunflower feeding from the figure of the artist connects heaven with earth. Kiefer often uses seeds, which he incorporates in his works to symbolise life.

23, *Untitled, 1996*

[55] The Tree of Jesse depicts a tree emerging from a man's loins and is often used in Christian imagery and refers to Isaiah's prophesy in the Old Testament of the birth of Christ and the Spirit out of the family tree of Jesse.

Spiritual Connections and Response to the Land

Wolfgang Laib (Germany, 1950)

The symbolic use of materials is of great importance in the work of Wolgang Laib. Anthony Bond writes in the catalogue accompanying Laib's exhibition:

> Prior to the Renaissance in Europe and in most other cultures, the material from which an object was fashioned could be at least as potent as the icon itself. Christian imagery that purports to incorporate a piece of the true cross or a bone of a saint requires us to combine a reading of the image with our response to the literal presence of the thing itself.[56]

When I visited Laib's exhibition in Melbourne, I realised how his work expressed many of the qualities I was looking for. He uses nature as a departure point for his work and his work deals with the cycle of life, in this way relating to what I have aimed for in some of my work.

Like Beuys and Kiefer, Laib uses his materials in a symbolic way, but he also uses them in a more meditative way. He works intensively with a very select number of materials: pollen, rice, wax, milk and marble, which he employs in formal arrangements.

Wolfgang Laib's interest in Eastern philosophies as well as in transcendental abstraction is reflected in his work, which has a numinous quality and invites us to contemplate on the archetypal. It becomes a link between the exterior world and our interior world and makes us question: What is milk? What is pollen? What is rice? [57]

Like the bees, Laib has carefully collected the pollen according to the life cycle of the plants and ritualistically spread them in the gallery environment. As in most of his works, process is of great importance. The pollen radiates an intense luminosity and speaks of life and its fragility, and of our connection to the natural world. The formal arrangements of the

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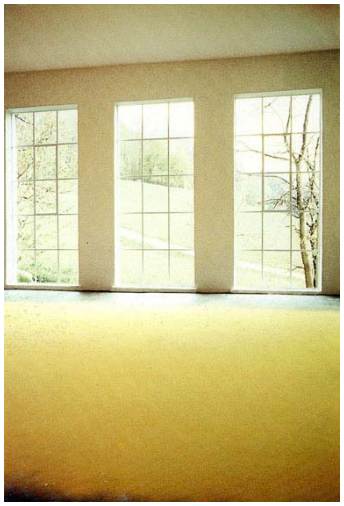
[56] Bond, Anthony, *Wolfgang Laib*, (catalogue essay), Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2005, p.7.
[57] Bond, Anthony, 2005, Ibid., p.12

work exhibit a tranquil beauty. He uses his natural materials sparingly and with great sensitivity.

24. Laib *Sifting pollen from dandelion.*



25. Laib, *Pollen from pine*

In the catalogue for Laib's exhibition in Paris, Harald Szeeman writes:

> For Laib, abstract art is the tangible expression of a present microcosm hinting at possible future macrocosm where organic matter joins the inorganic, where sculpture becomes shrine, pollen pure pigment, field, mountain….These are neither small nor medium-sized sculptures nor even objects, but plastic statements which inspire meditation. They induce meditation on what is fragile and untouchable…on what is time, time invested by the artist, his own time, the time of nature, universal time.[58]

The collection of leaves and flowers to produce the plant dyes and the collecting and spreading of the charcoal for my sculptural installations relate to Laib's collection of pollen and the creation of his works within a gallery environment.

Kiki Smith (American, born in Germany, 1954)

It was not until I was well into the research project that I came across a book about Kiki Smith.[59] I immediately felt an affinity for her work, in particular the works she made during the late eighties and early nineties:

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[58] Szeeman, Harald, " From mystical marriage to plastic statement" in *Wolfgang Laib,* ARC Musee d'Art Moderne De La Ville De Paris, 1986, p.24.

[59] Smith, Kiki, Posner, Helaine, *Kiki Smith*, Canada: Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown Company (Inc.), 1998

works on paper such as *Peabody (Animal Drawings)* (1996), or *Dowry Cloth* (1990), and her bronze sculpture *Untitled (Roses)* (1993-94). Smith uses a diverse range of materials and artistic techniques. This, and her engagement with spiritual and mythological subjects, relate to my work, as does her blurring of the boundaries between arts and craft. Smith appreciates working with her hands, not only in fine arts but also in applied arts.[60] For Smith, as for the other artists who have influenced my project, drawing is an important part of her work, not just as a way of working out ideas but also for producing large-scale images. The drawings of life-size animal or human figures are often composed on several sheets of paper and stuck together as single figures on the wall or sometimes in larger arrangements on the gallery floor.

26, Smith, *Untitled (Roses)*

27, Smith, *Peabody (Animal Drawings)*

Smiths' *Untitled (Roses)* sculpture, an image of a woman with roses growing from her back, refers to the Virgin Mary. Roses are associated with the Virgin's purity and beauty. The thorns symbolise her son's suffering and death. There is a long history of imagery of vegetation growing out of humans, not only in Catholic religion but also in many cultures all over the world. This work relates also to Kiefer's many images of men from which trees or flowers sprout. Although I have not used the human figure in my work, this piece also relates my work *Sanctuary*.

[60] Aherns, Carsten, *All creatures great and small: Kiki Smith's Artistic Worlds*, Scalo Zurich: Kestner Gessellshaft, 1999, p.14.

Smith's Catholic background and mythological themes are a major influence in her work. She states:

> One of the things about Catholicism is, it's a religion that's about making things physical, about taking emotional and spiritual ideas and making them physical.[61]

Her early, often autobiographical work, deals with the body. Birth and death are the central subjects during the first few years of her arts practice; in her later works nature becomes more emphasised. Her imagery includes flowers, animals, snowflakes, stars and moons. Smith exposes our relationship with nature, which on the one hand we admire, but in reality we destroy. Her drawings have their origin in observations; she often draws in museums of natural history.[62]

John Wolseley (Lives in Australia, born in UK, 1938)

According to David Tacey, the only way to develop a spiritually powerful culture here in Australia is by returning to nature, experiencing again the sacred source from which all life evolves. We can urge each other to 'care more' about the environment, but unless there is a spiritual renewal of our consciousness and we have revised our sense of identity to include the natural world, our best intentions may be in vain.[63]

It is John Wolseley's ecological concerns and his eclectic use of materials that I am particularly interested in. His way of using nature as a collaborator in some of his work, by letting nature take part in the creative process, is similar to the way I use dyes. Wolseley states:

> I did not set out to paint environmental deprivation, nor am I naturally disposed to making art, which has a primary didactic purpose. However, I have done some of both because of the circumstances of painting in wild, or once wild country. It is here

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[61] Posner, Helaine, *Kiki Smith*, Canada: Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown Company (Inc.) 1988, p.22.
[62] Beker, Ilma, "Traces of contact" in, *Kiki Smith, small sculptures, large drawings*, (catalogue), Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001, p.41.
[63] Tacey, David, J. *Edge of the sacred: transformation in Australia*, Blackburn North Victoria: Harper Collins, 1995, p.175.

> that one is physically impinged upon, even physically excluded from the site of agents of degradation and consumption, and as a result, one's anger is so roused that, cornered as it were, one uses the only weapon one knows, one's art, and attempts to make that art- a didactic sword.[64]

The English born John Wolseley shows a reverence for life and the earth and uses drawing as a way to explore the environment. Akin to explorers' journals, his detailed drawings are often combined to form large-scale collages. He combines diary notes, maps and rubbings to produce large-scale installations. These installations frequently include sculptural pieces, natural and ready-made objects. Sometimes, he lets nature stain and tear his paper and buries it under the soil to be left for months while it takes on the colouring of the earth, or he rubs the paper against charred branches to let them 'help' him draw. His work avoids fixed perspectives. He investigates the whole of nature by concentrating on, and combining its particulars. He uses nature's forms and materials and embeds them in his work.

28. Wolseley, *Nov. 28 Different trees drawn by their own charcoal*.

Different trees drawn by their own charcoal is one of the works Wolseley made on his wanderings on Mount Solitary, west of Alice Springs. He has drawn aerial views of the bush landscape using charcoal from several trees and has used ochres found nearby. He then created a collage of the

[64] Wolseley, John, Letter to the author, November 1997, in Sasha Grishin, *John Wolseley, land marks*, Australia: Craftsman House, 1998, p.157.

different images adding written notes and thus recording his journey and the materials collected along the way. Of the work he says:

> … These sheets of paper passed trough rainstorms, were carried on the backs of lorries on which I got lifts, on my back rolled up as I walked,… Not only were they changed by wear and tear, dust and ashes of that environment, but I myself subjected them to markings and experiments using the physical elements of that environment; the different carbons from the burnt trees and red and yellow earths across which I moved.[65]

Wolseley has worked and exhibited on many occasions in Tasmania and has shown great concern for the Tasmanian old growth forest and the ongoing logging of it. As I did when I arrived in Tasmania, Wolseley saw himself, when arriving in Australia, as a refugee from the environmental degradation occurring in Europe. Since then he has become a prominent and outspoken environmentalist. The reason for his obsession, and also for my concern with cool temperate forests, which represent the Australian flora, is the fact that so very few are left. His installation *Burnie Myrtle Beech woodchip pile* is just one way of showing his concern. He is fascinated by the way humans treat and scar the natural environment, and sometimes sees himself as a war artist surrounded by weapons of destruction made out of bulldozers and woodchip machines.[66]

29. *The environment: a cry of fear.*

30. *Burnie woodchip pile.*

[65] John Wolseley, Artist's Statement, *Recent Works by John Wolseley*, Realities, Melbourne, 6-30 September 1982.

[66] John Wolseley as quoted in " Endnote…and a conclusion? A conversation between John Wolseley and Tim Cadman" in *John Wolseley: Patagonia to Tasmania, origin movement species tracing the southern continents*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Ian Potter Gallery, The University of Melbourne, 1996, p. np.

Peter Booth (Lives in Australia, born in UK, 1940)

> As with all the deepest cosmic secrets revealed by genius, it is wise to take a circuitous flight round the Tree of Knowledge, hovering about the aromatic incense as it is diffused through the air, dwelling in the atmosphere of its revelation.[67]

The opening quote by John Cowper Powys in the catalogue *Peter Booth: Human/Nature* reveals a lot about Booth's work. Peter Booth paints life and his journey through it, with all its joys and struggles, its darkness, dreams and visions. Some works exude great energy, others a sense of silent contemplation. His symbolic, imaginary works result from a continued observation of the surrounding world. He has a holistic worldview where humans are interconnected with the natural world and he sees the natural environment as a critical issue of our times. His philosophy has, like that of many contemporary artists who are concerned with the state of the world and of nature, philosophical roots found in the spiritual life and arts of some eastern cultures.[68] Like Beuys and Kiefer, Booth also has an interest in the practices and power of shamans as agents between ordinary and metaphysical human conditions.[69] Other influences for Booth's journey towards the spiritual unity of all living things are the mystical works of author Isaac Bashevis Singers,[70] as well as the wood engravings of the mystic, Romantic poet and artist William Blake.[71] In his world humans become unified with non-humans within a divine nature.[72]

In Booth's work we see a transition between seemingly pure abstraction and narrative figuration, which makes it difficult to locate the work within a stylistic classification. Booth maintains that his art is emotional rather than cerebral and that he has no need to enter the theoretical debates of the

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[67] Quote by John Cowper Powys in: Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, p.7.
[68] Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, p.8.
[69] Smith, Jason, 2003, Ibid., p.12.
[70] Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91), Polish Yiddish author, 1978 Nobel Prize winner, In his Nobel Prize oration Singer declared:' The pessimism of the creative person is not decadence but a mighty passion for redemption of man'. www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1978/singer-lecture.html (viewed 30/12/2005)
[71] William Blake (1757-1827) Romantic artist, mystic and visionary. Illustrated amongst other works *Virgil's Pastorals.*
[72] Smith, Jason, 2003, Ibid, p.9.

art world. He says: 'Whether a picture is abstract or figurative is not the issue – it's what the painting says about the human condition'.[73]

31. left: *Painting*.
32. Above: *Untitled*,

Booth often uses black in his paintings as well as in his drawings. From his spiritually imbued, black, so-called 'doorway' series of the early nineteen seventies, to his dark landscapes, many of his strongly emotionally charged paintings and drawings are characterised by their blackness. He has explored black's various densities and notes: ''black is' strong and beautiful – the colour of the universe.'[74] To him black can also reflect a positive spiritual state, an emptying out of desire and frustration, a void that represents a communication with the Unknown One. These thoughts relate to western medieval Christian mysticism as well as Eastern teachings.[75]

Drawing has always played an important part in Booth's work. He records observations of nature as well as imagery from memories and dreams. He has always kept a parallel practice of figurative and abstract drawings from which his paintings evolve.[76]

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[73] Smith, Jason, 2003, Ibid, p.12.
[74] Smith, Jason, 2003, Ibid, p.13.
[75] Robert Lindsey, "Hard Rain, The iconography of Peter Booth" in Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: human / nature*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p.19.
[76] Robert Lindsey, 2003, Ibid, p.19.

In a recent publication about contemporary drawing, Emma Dexter writes:

> Drawing, through its loose association with personal unfettered expression, is the medium through which the past has often spoken most clearly and directly. Via its early history, drawing connects with a suppressed, shamanistic, atavistic, and pagan history of European culture,…[77]

Many elements of Booth's art find reflections in my work: the way Booth uses light, which he seems to draw out of an intense blackness, to create a sense of mystery in his works; this as well his gestural mark making, his concern for the environment, the fact that he often works from childhood memories and his use of symbolically loaded imagery. In Booth's exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria (2005), I was also attracted to the lighting of his work within the dark space. It produced a heightened sense of mystery and gave the central room, with focused light on the paintings of hybrid creatures, and dark spaces in between, a cathedral-like feeling. The atmosphere reminded me of the churches I visited as a child, where paintings of gory scenes of martyrs and apocalyptic visions of hell were combined with abstracted imagery. These places were, like Booth's exhibition, places for contemplation of or journey through life and death. They triggered strong emotional responses. The dimly lit rooms in the exhibition, where the smaller drawings were displayed, exuded a more restful and tomblike atmosphere.

For over a decade Booth's work has shown his preoccupation with the environment. His many forest scenes show his concern for the forest. His very large 1993-94 painting *Daintree*, depicts a lush forest illuminated by a luminous sky. One can almost see the plants growing, bursting out of the ground. This contrasts strongly with the drawing of the *Devastated Daintree landscape*, where the verdant green is replaced with stumps and ghost-like devastation.

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[77] Dexter, Emma, *Vitamin D, new perspectives in drawing*, London, Phaidon Press, 2005, p.9.




33. Top right :*Daintree.*
34. Top left: *Drawing (Devastated Daintree landscape).*
35. Bottom right: *Winter*, 1993
36. Bottom left: *Untitled 1999*, (detail)

Some of Friedrich's and Kiefer's winter landscapes reverberate in Booth's snow landscapes; similarly there is a strong feeling of silence. In the painting *Winter*, we see an image of serenity, perhaps there is a promise of renewal. Booth's *Untitled 1999* painting, however, speaks of destruction; even the ladder[78]depicted in the work seems to fall over. Perhaps there is some hope symbolised in the orange glimpses of sky in the background? In the harsh environment, all is frozen.

A similar concern for the environment that we find in Booth's work, as well as his sense of silence in his later work, is reflected in my drawings and sculptural installation work.

[78] The ladder is also a symbol for the tree and the connection between heaven and earth.

CHAPTER III

HOW THE PROJECT WAS PURSUED

Stage one

Exploring different materials and development towards the use of materials resourced from the tree

The first four months of the project were mainly taken up by looking at the historical background of the sacred tree, finding a contemporary context for my work and experimenting with different materials.

I started researching the historical context from a European point of view, reading such books as Fraser's *Golden Bough,*[79] Schama's *Landscape and Memory*[80] and Prudence and Pennick's *History of Pagan Europe*.[81] I also conducted an extensive Internet search to explore the history of the veneration of trees. I became more aware of the enormous role trees played in ancient Europe and all over the world. Alongside this historical research I started looking at contemporary artists dealing with concepts of ecology, environmentalism and spirituality. I looked at the work of a wide range of artists, amongst them David Keeling, Richard Long, Rosalie Gascoigne, Fiona Hall, David Nash, Jill Orr, Judy Watson, Guiseppe Penome and Ugo Rondinone.

37. Chantale Delrue, *Golden crown*

38. Chantale Delrue, *Oak branches*

[79] Frazer, J.G., *The golden bough*, London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., (abridged edition, vol.1), 1957,
[80] Schama, Simon, *Landscape and memory*, London: Fontana Press, 1996.
[81] Pennick, Nigel & Jones, Prudence, *A history of pagan Europe*, London: Routledge, 1995.

My initial idea was to use more sculptural techniques. I constructed a 'golden crown' of leaves from copper foil. I envisaged making a very large one to hang in a beautiful oak I spotted at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. I made some small shrines and wax figures and experimented, using wood for sculptural forms. I experimented with digital imagery and made a video combining drawings and footage taken at the Wielangta forest in Southern Tasmania. I was dissatisfied with the results of the work at this stage.

Stage two

I started exploring the writings of Mircea Eliade and looked into the works of the Romantics, especially Friedrich, and I read about the Enlightenment and the nature/culture division.
I became very interested in the work of Anselm Kiefer, especially the work dealing with German history and its connection to the Teutonic myth and the Teutoburg forest. I investigated his ways of working, the way he layers paints and other materials and his use of materials such as lead, seeds and straw as signifiers.

About four months into the project I decided that I would concentrate on using mainly material from the tree to fulfil my research project. I became aware of the enormous variety of ways in which I could use these materials to express my concerns. I wanted the work to embody the tree as well as represent it, in this way relating my work to Christian shrines which may contain a piece of what is claimed to be of Christ's crown of thorns[82], a bone of a saint or an equally significant piece of cloth. I considered using wood for sculpture, charcoal for drawing and installation work, and using flowers and leaves from which to extract dyes.

[82] Like the one still used in Wevelgem, the village where I was born.

Drawing

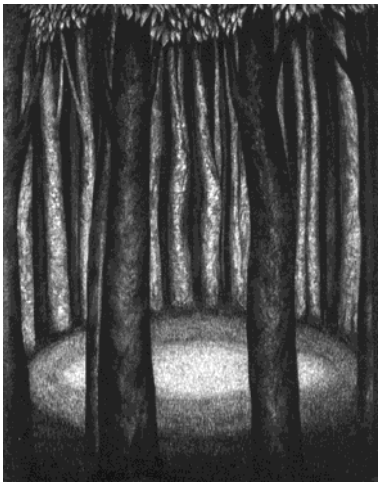
During a series of visits to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens I used native and European trees as the subjects for empirical studies. I interpreted these sketches and combined them with my interior view of the symbolic tree, resulting in the production of a series of small charcoal drawings. These works served as a good exercise for developing my charcoal drawing technique and to discover the intrinsic qualities of the medium. Previously, I had very little experience in drawing with charcoal. I experimented with different sorts of charcoal and investigated ways of layering and patterning as well as exploring different compositions and light effects. Through the drawings I tried to convey a sense of the mythical and of mystery, where the division between the internal and external world is blurred. Through my experiments, I realised that charcoal is an ideal medium with which to produce subtle tonal gradations and dramatic chiaroscuro to create atmosphere in the work.


39 & 40. Charcoal drawings, 2003

The result of this work was an exhibition, *The Sacred Tree* (2003) at the Tasmanian Botanical Gardens during Living Artists Week. The exhibition venue was ideal for the work, as a lot of the drawings were based on trees in the gardens.

In order to produce a more evocative effect, I decided that I needed to greatly enlarge the scale of my drawings so that they would, like a big tree or a forest, relate to the body as well as the eye. I therefore progressed to the first large drawing, *Sacred Circle* (W.1500mm x H.2200mm). The drawing depicts trees forming a circle, evoking feelings of a mythological past relating to European history of sacred groves. The image of the grove

draws us into the circle between the trees; spatial depth is created through overlapping the foreground trees with the background and through variation of scale. The drawing evolved over a period of a week. It was my first experiment with tonal values on a large scale.


41. *Sacred Circle,* 2003

Following the *Sacred Circle* drawing were the *Sacred Oak* [83] and *Dusk* drawings. I began to gain more confidence in my charcoal drawing technique, and in *Dusk*, the third drawing, I attempted to represent a feeling of the sublime. I made the largest possible drawing that the width of my studio could permit. The work draws one into the picture, under the tree, while the background recedes into the distance.

Making large drawings is a very physical experience. Putting on layer upon layer of charcoal, day after day, becomes a ritual and a performance-like activity. As the layers build up, subtle changes are created, tones become darker and take on a mysterious quality, depth is created and light is drawn from the darkness. The three large drawings very much evoke an awakening of memories from an ancestral past and are an expression of a search for identity, of going back to my roots, a process that also very much relates to Kiefer's work.[84]

Experiments combining charcoal drawings with ephemeral sculptures


42.Collecting charcoal, 2003

Although I realised that the large drawings, through their sheer size, had a far greater impact than the small ones, I wanted to achieve

[83] *Sacred Oak*: charcoal drawing and ephemeral sculpture is discussed on p. 54.

[84] Kiefer takes seriously an idea that most moderns reject: that the renewal of our world may require that we return to ancient and archaic ideas. One aspect of this use of ancient ideas has to do with the close relationship between earth and the sacred. (Gilmour, John C., *Fire on earth: Anselm Kiefer and the postmodern world*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, p.126.)

a more total involvement of the senses and decided to venture into a three dimensional experience by combining the drawings with ephemeral sculptural work.

When I seriously started contemplating the use of charcoal I decided to use not only bought commercial material but also charcoal actually collected from the forest. As I needed a large amount, I contacted Forestry Tasmania and obtained a permit for collecting and a map of where a recent burn had been done. On a grey weekend my friend and I set off, the car filled with an axe, shovels and large garbage bins to a forest site past Glen Huon and started the fairly time-consuming job of chopping the charcoal from the leftover burnt logs. I needed several trips to collect enough of this material. This is the charcoal I have used for the ephemeral sculptural work. For the drawings I have combined this charcoal with commercial drawing charcoal, to get a greater range of tonal values.

As a trial, in one of the Tasmanian School of Art foyers, between two large wooden posts, I combined the *Sacred Circle* drawing with a sculptural ephemeral work consisting of a circle (2m diameter) which related in size, impact and colour, to the circle in the drawing. In this sculptural installation the outer circle was made out of charcoal and surrounded an inner circle of salt, which was contained by a narrow bright red edge of the container in which the salt was kept. The salt, like the charcoal, has an ambiguous meaning. It alludes to the rising of salt levels through deforestation, but can also be seen, like the charcoal, as a material for purification. In alchemy, charcoal is used for purification. In this work it is also suggested that the tree purifies the air. In combining this circle with the drawing, the space between and around the work became activated. The combination of the works in the environment and the worn-looking posts on either side of the drawing, gave the installation an ancient feeling. The perspective in the drawing became extended by the sculptural element. The limited colour scheme fitted perfectly in the environment. The work was on display for about two weeks and I was intrigued to see that, as time went by, salt crystals started forming over the edge of its

container and growing onto the charcoal of the outer circle. The piece was alive! I felt very pleased with this first trial.[85]


43.Fine Art Gallery, 2003

Some time later, towards the end of my first year in the program, I experimented further through the installation of some works at the University of Tasmania's Fine Art Gallery. I placed the *Sacred Circle* drawing on the far wall and made three circles of equal size leading up to the drawing. The circle closest to the drawing was of charcoal, the middle circle was made of earth, the centre of which was a pool of water, while the circle furthest away had a centre of earth with a basin of blood, and was surrounded with bark and an outer rim of lush oak leaves, giving a springtime feeling of lushness.

Although I liked the combination of the three circles with the drawing, I found the work did not have the same strength as the previous trial. The combination of too many elements within the work took away from its essence. I resolved to pare back the number of components.

During this stage I also commenced experimenting with the extraction of dyes from leaves of the trees, a technique that I developed further in the next stage.

Stage three

Extracting and transferring the life juice from the tree

I looked at writers such as David Tacey,[86] Anna Voight[87] and Nick Waterlow,[88] who deal with concepts of spirituality and the Australian environment.

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[85] No images are available for this work.
[86] Tacey, David J., *Edge of the Sacred: transformation in Australia*, Blackburn North Victoria, Australia: Harper Collins Pty. Ltd., 1995.
[87] Voigt, Anna, *New visions, new perspectives: voices of contemporary Australian women artists*, Roseville East NSW: Craftsman House, 1996.

Again using materials from the trees, I decided to pursue a different line of investigation. I began an extensive range of experiments by extracting dyes from leaves, bark and flowers from the trees. Initially, I experimented with the dyes on silk, cotton and woollen fabrics. The concepts behind this technique were about transferring the essence or life of the tree to fabric or paper. The extraction of dyes from the plant material is very slow and not unlike an alchemical process.[89] After some experimentation, I decided that the use of silk was not relevant to my project. Cotton did not give very good results, as the dye does not work on plant fibres as well as upon the fibres derived from animal sources.


44. Process


45. Forest composition

I cut up woollen blankets[90] obtained from a local op-shop into pieces, each approximately 40 cm square in size. When the colour of my dye was to my satisfaction I immersed one or two pieces of blanket, which were left to boil for several more hours.

I also decided to experiment by using paper as support. For the dyeing of paper I used large containers and poured the dye over the paper. At times I left the paper for several days or even weeks in the dye-bath, until I was satisfied with the resulting colour or texture. Sometimes I repeated this process several times with the same piece of wool or paper, seeking to achieve a layered effect and more intense shades of colour and texture. I tried dipping and folding as well as tying more plant material between the

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[88] Waterlow, Nick OAM, Mellich Ross, *Spirit and place: art in Australia*, Sydney, Australia: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991.

[89] See appendix 2 for technical information on dyeing with natural materials.

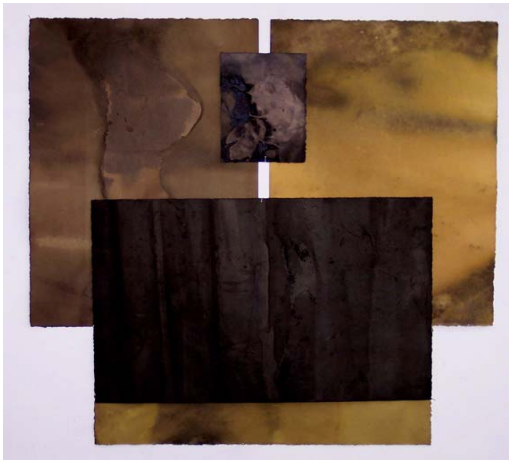
[90] I use creamy-coloured hospital blankets that were popular during the early- to mid-nineteen hundreds. Some might have holes or are frayed at the edges; this adds visual evidence of the materials' history, which is embedded in its fibre. Generations of people might have used these very blankets for protection from the cold or just for comfort.

pieces. I experimented with many different sorts of papers. Some fell apart while others were too stiff. I decided that, for my purpose, Stonehenge and Khadi paper were the most suitable.

The resulting pieces of woollen blanket and paper are embedded with traces of life of the tree and provide a metaphor for a spiritual journey. The colours are very appealing; they vary from soft rich browns, to shades of greys, greens and intense luminous yellows. The results range from very subtle tonal variations, to areas where the leaves or branches leave ghostlike imprints, to pitch black areas.

I started experimenting with formal qualities of the work by combining the pieces of paper or wool into geometric compositions and by exploring combinations of shapes and colours. My aim was to compose works imbued with the essence of the tree and evoke a feeling of contemplation. The works are a link with the immaterial world and an attempt to grasp the forces of nature. I wanted to make objects of beauty, like small abstract shrines, to draw people in and make them aware of the wonders of nature.

46. *Forest Composition*, 2004



47. *Forest Composition*, 2004

The outcome of this work led me to *Tree Tales*, a solo exhibition at Entrepot Gallery at the Centre for the Arts (2004). I exhibited nine of the twenty-five *Forest Compositions* I had made. Each work was made out of paper. This exhibition resulted in the inclusion of four of my works in *The Place Where Three Dreams Cross*,[91] an exhibition that deals with notions

[91] *The Place Where Three Dreams Cross*. Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania curated by Bryony Nainby, (at the moment of this writing touring around the country).

of environment and combines the works of Western Australian, Tasmanian and Central Desert artists.

48. *The Place Where Three Dreams Cross*, Plimsoll Gallery

I decided to make a larger work with the woollen blanket pieces. This became the first *Forest Blanket.*

In another trial at the Fine Arts Gallery, I combined some of the large drawings and a frieze of the dyed works, as well as the *Forest Blanket (1).*

Forest Blanket (1) alludes to the aerial landscape, where paddocks have taken over the wilderness, and to the loss of diversity. The feeling and texture of the boiled wool draws out a feeling for the archetypal and relates to Beuys' use of felt. Although in his work the felt refers to protection, in my work the woollen blanket refers to the loss of forest cover, that loss which in the physical world, produces global warming. *Forest Blanket* (1) also relates to Kiki Smiths' *Dowry Cloth,* a hand-stitched work made from sheep wool and human hair, as well as to the Wagga rugs.[92]

49.*Death Blanket, Forest blanket*, 2004

For this trial, I also made *Death Blanket*. This was the charcoal piece made to complement *Forest Blanket.* I displayed the two blankets, close together like a diptych, on low plinths. Through this show I realised,

[92] These quilts were originally made by men in the bush and used outdoors; they were mainly used during the depression era in Australia, and used to keep warm on the road while looking for work. Later the term was used to describe bed coverings also made by women and used inside the home as well as outdoors. Rolfe, Margaret, *Patchwork Quilts in Australia,* Richmond Victoria, Australia: Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, 1987, p.96.

even more than before, how very important it was to control the environment in which the work was displayed. The combination of works and the interfering doors and windows in the setting did not inspire the contemplative environment I was trying to achieve.

I explored the combinations and compositions of dyed work on paper quite extensively but decided not to use this work for presentation for my final exhibition. I am intending to produce more work along these lines; however I feel that they do not fulfil my aim for this project - of activating the space and producing a close connection between the work and the viewer – as well as the other works do.

Stage four

Environments of Contemplation

During this stage I decided to concentrate on integrating and uniting the work with the space in which it is exhibited. When I was offered the Moonah Art Centre to exhibit my work during the *Ten Days on the Island* festival (2005), I decided to take up this challenge. Additionally, on a trip to Launceston I visited the Design Centre of Tasmania and found the new section, where normally the Wood Design Collection is exhibited, to be a very suitable space for my work. The curator agreed for me to have a show at the Centre and allowed me to use all three galleries.

Design Centre

For the Design Centre exhibition I made two tall and narrow drawings, *Contemplation* and *Life.* Initially, I had intended to hang them in the alcoves on either side of the entrance to Gallery One. When I put the works up however, I decided to place them almost facing each other on the two large walls at right angles to the back wall. In terms of the formal arrangement of the works within the space, the hanging of the drawings became as much an exercise as their actual making. The drawings complemented the proportions of the walls and the rectangular rooms, with their strong horizontal and vertical lines. The soft sandstone colour of the

floor, the chalky surface of the walls intersected with beautiful wooden beams, the soft natural light coming from the ceiling all enhanced the dark matte charcoal surface of the drawings. These, in turn, connected with the two ephemeral site-specific sculptures on the floor of the two side galleries.

51. *Contemplation*

52. *Life*

For one of the galleries I used the *Sacred Oak* drawing, which is based on a sketch that I made of a majestic old oak tree in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. The subject of the oak tree, with its trunk placed in a

central position, refers to the world axis. In the classic world the Oak was said to be the Tree of Life, and associated with the druids. The oak fills the picture plane. The work draws the spectator into the picture and under the canopy. The combined work of the drawing and the accompanying *Sacred Oak* sculptural installation was exhibited at the Design Centre in Gallery Two. It visually connected the works in Gallery One with the works in Gallery Three as well as conceptually connecting work relating to ancient Celtic history with the work about contemporary Australia.

52, Design Centre, 2005

The whole atmosphere was that of a place of contemplation, a modern cathedral. I was extremely pleased with the outcome and convinced it would be very hard for me to find a place as suitable to exhibit the work as the Design Centre.

53& 54, Design Centre, 2005

Moonah Art Centre

I knew that I would have to tackle a different range of spatial problems in the Moonah Art Centre environment. A single large space, the centre has a series of windows intersecting either side as well as doors at the front and back walls. I experimented with different ground plans. I decided to place the three moveable walls close to the entrance of the building and in such a way that they created their own entrance to the main space, with the middle one set about two metres forward of the two side walls. This created a screen and entrance space when entering into the gallery, but also a passage on either side of the central wall, not unlike some entrances of churches to enter into the main exhibition space.

For the central wall, facing the building's entrance, I made the *Blood*, drawing/ installation. It was the first time I had introduced colour in a drawing. This very eye-catching red drew immediate attention. On the floor, into a formal rectangle and relating to the size and concept of the drawing, I installed a series of charred sticks that complemented the drawing.

55. *Blood*

56. *Circle, Dusk*, Moonah Art Centre

57. *Circle, Connection, Sacred Circle, Sacred Oak*, Moonah Art Centre 2005

With the Moonah Art Centre in mind I made the drawing *Connection*, a drawing of two paperbark trees, almost touching at their base, their trunks growing apart but their crowns touching again. For the exhibition, I placed this drawing and the *Sacred Oak* drawing on either side of the *Sacred Circle* drawing, which were all hung on the back of the three moveable walls. Taking up the centre of the main space I installed a large circle of charcoal, approximately nine metres in diameter. This circle, pared back to its most essential form, looked quite impressive and contrasted with the beautiful wooden floor. On the back wall I placed *Dusk.* The placing and size of this drawing, with its numinous quality, somehow reminded me of paintings in some of the European chapels, as one viewed it from a distance on entering the main space of the gallery.

European sojourn

I returned to Europe for a few months during the summer of 2005 and had an exhibition in Belgium. Upon my arrival I was again absolutely stunned by the lushness of the spring green vegetation. I could again feel this incredible sense of fecundity of nature. This intense feeling of growth which I found quite overwhelming.

While in Europe I also visited Berlin where I saw first-hand the work of Anselm Kiefer. This was a great and daunting experience. The aura of the work spreads well beyond its physical presence, the feelings I experienced are still with me. Kiefer's work often relates to violent episodes of history, but to me it invites quiet contemplation. This contemplation I have found very relevant to my research.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORK BEING PRESENTED IN THE EXHIBITION

Introduction

> *…soon I discovered that, just as forests were once everywhere in the geographical sense, so too they were everywhere in the fossil record of cultural memory.*[93]

The works presented in the exhibition are an expression of my journey through the research project and also through life. They track my European origin and deal with my engagement with the place in which I now live. The works refer to my love for the Australian bush and fear for its destruction. They speak of the interconnectedness of humans and nature and encourage contemplating the sacredness of nature and of life on this planet. I have placed the works in meditative environments. These are made up through the use of separate rooms or spaces in which the lighting is controlled to enhance contemplation. *Nemeton* refers to the times when the forest was sacred, but also to current issues of rising salt levels. Two of the spaces, *Sanctuary* and *30 Days in the Bush*, convey ideas about life: the first refers to my childhood, the other deals with the diversity of life on my bush block. The space *Cycle* deals with the ideas of life and regeneration: it is dark and mysterious. *Tomb*, is a very sombre place and deals with death and destruction. Two of the spaces combine figurative and abstract works. The materials from the tree and a limited palette of colours are unifying and connecting factors in the works. The works, whether abstract, figurative or a combination of both, form a unique symbolic language. The gallery environment has, to some extent influenced my choice of works for this exhibition.

Nemeton

This installation follows on from the *Sacred Circle* installation, but here the elements are pared back further. The charcoal circle has become larger

[93] Harrison, Robert Pogue, *Forests*: *the shadow of civilization*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.x.

and I have not included the drawing. The circle refers to early forest enclosures and to the cycle of life. It also refers to be the basis of the ground-plan of early martyries.[94] In its centre we see a circle of salt that is slowly rising; sadly perhaps, there is a parallel here between the martyrs the real-life trees that are also dying as a consequence of some forest practices.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary is a combination of a drawing (*Sanctuary*) and sculptural installation (*Oak Circle*). The work is intended to encourage contemplation of life and the fecundity of nature. The work refers to Celtic fertility goddesses and their offspring, the Christian Virgin. It is very much informed by my own childhood and cultural memories,[95] and by the notion of the forest protecting the earth.

The drawing *Sanctuary*, follows on from the *Sacred Oak* drawing I made during the second stage of my project which I combined with the ephemeral sculpture for the show at the Design Centre of Tasmania.

58. *Sanctuary*

For *Sanctuary* I decided to change the shape of the oak drawing. I wanted to suggest, by the shape of the oak drawing a more feminine, embracing quality. I wanted it to convey a greater feeling of protection; hence I

[94] Martyries: shrines to martyrs or miraculous Marian images

[95] In Celtic culture the oak tree is associated with the Druids, and groves of oaks were places of worship. In Celtic philosophy human beings are not separate from nature, but an aspect of it, and the cosmos is composed of ever-changing forms that fade imperceptibly from one form into the other, yet always expressing the same essence.
Pennick,Nigel, *The Sacred world of the Celts, an illustrated guide to Celtic spirituality and mythology*, United Kingdom: Goldsfield Press,1997, p.42

decided to give it a dome shape. This form also alludes to the shape of the oak tree, as well as to grottoes and the virgin's cloak. This work also shares concepts with Kiki Smith's work *Untitled (Roses),* which relates to the earth goddess, cosmic mother and the Virgin. I experimented with the placement of the drawing in relationship to the circle, initially I placing it close to the ground. I subsequently decided, however, to place it higher on the wall to give a greater impression of being under the canopy of the oak

In her book *New visions – New perspectives,* Anna Voigt writes:

> Numerous creative women everywhere… are returning to their origins – both personal and ancestral archaic. To return to origins is to return to the source and primal locations of life, to memory, to the body of self and Earth- to birth, growth stages, decay and rebirth in a ceaseless cycle – as arenas for the processes, forms and mysteries of existence.[96]

Playing, as a child, under the oak's overarching canopy, I had a feeling of protection, but also of mystery. I could see out, but people could not see me. The oak's canopy acted like a veil, with the sunlight dancing through it. It felt like being under the cloak of the virgin as she embraced the universe. The depiction of the virgin with outspread mantle in the wayside shrines is quite common in Europe.

The *Oak Circle* ephemeral sculpture is made up of concentric circles.[97] Its circular format refers, as in *Nemeton,* to the circle of life, to eternity without beginning or end.

Water at its centre and surrounded by a circle of bark symbolises the trunk, that leads water from the earth to the sky referring in turn to the mythological cosmic axis at the centre of the world. The bark comes from the Ockerby Oak, which once grew next to the chapel of the Launceston

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[96] Voigt, Anna, *New Visions – New perspectives: voices of contemporary Australian women artists*, Australia: Craftsman House, 1996, p.12.

[97] The circle is important in Christian symbology as a symbol of heaven. It signifies perfection and eternity. The circle was the basis of ground plans of some Renaissance churches (shrines to miraculous Marian images or to martyrs), and several Baroque churches. The circle is widely used as a symbol for the sun, itself a symbol of the origin of life. Zen Buddhist, Rosicrucians and other esoteric Christian sects use drawings of concentric circles to symbolise the different stages of inner perfection. Shepherd, Rowena & Rupert, *1000 Symbols*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002, p.334.

hospital. The oak was felled to make way for a helipad. The bark forms a connection to the many years I lived in Launceston and the proximity of the oak to the life-saving hospital. Visually, the circular installation connects with the dome-shaped drawing and the imaginary circle made by oak branches and leaves that cascade around the trunk of the tree in the drawing.

The work brings together my childhood history with my life in Tasmania. With its life-giving water, acorns, vibrant green moss and its brilliant green ferns from the forest, the circle alludes to fertility rites and festivals. It conveys a feeling of spring, vigour, and fecundity; it symbolises life,

Resting Place, Tree of Life

In the space containing *Resting Place* and *Tree of Life* we are encouraged to contemplate the mystery of life and regeneration. In the drawing/sculptural installation *Resting Place* the image rises from the charcoal and disappears back into it. On the opposite wall we see a drawing of the *Tree of Life*.

I started this work a few months after I finished the drawing/installation *Blood*. I was not quite satisfied with *Blood* as it insufficiently conveyed the ideas of regeneration and of the tree being taken up by the earth to become life for the next generation. After further investigations through the making of small sketches, I decided to change the perspective for this drawing and suggested an aerial view.

The tree in *Resting Place* is not reaching up or full of life, but lies down in a recumbent position. The lateral extension through the use of the horizontal format of the drawing and its low placement on the wall, combined with the charcoal installation on the floor, emphasises this reclining position. Based on an image of a eucalypt, is it is not an exact representation but a symbolic one, one that is imbued with feeling. Burnt and battered, the log merges with the forest floor; the earth that gave it life takes it up again, and gives life to the next generation. It is an image of transition from one state of being to another, of the cycle of life, now in

the process of completion. The charcoal drawing rises out of the charcoal rectangle, which lays like a shadow under it; and charcoal on the floor merges with the drawing to take it up again. Within the charcoal lay seeds, ready to sprout new life.

The layered gestural marks in the background of the drawing suggest the texture of the forest floor which, in embracing the log, and refers to the layering of the earth through consecutive deposits of forest residue.

On the opposite side of the space we see the drawing *Tree of Life.* This is not a straight-growing tree as are those in many of the traditional images of the trees of life. This tree is twisted and has lost some of its limbs, but still it reaches up to the sky and the heavens.

The act of drawing and assembling the charcoal became a meditative process. Feeling in both drawings is conveyed through line, texture and tone and through the richness of the material itself. The works are lit to enhance an atmosphere of mystery. In the work, culture (through the act of drawing) and nature (through subject and material) merge.

Tomb

In primeval times the forest covered much of the earth like a blanket. It protected it from the ravages of wind and sun. A solemn space, *Tomb* demands contemplation about the impact of the human world on the forest and the consequent loss of the richness of biodiversity. The work it deals with the death and destruction of the forest. *Tomb* encases the diptych *Forest Blanket (2)* and *Death Blankets;* like tombstones they sit gravely in the dark space.

For this work I have made a second, but darker Forest Blanket than that which I made in stage three of the project. I wanted to give this blanket a darker appearance, so as to convey a message of death. The size of both blankets is the same as the size of the original blankets from which Forest Blanket (2) is made. It relates to the human and domestic realm and also to

the destruction of the forest's diversity brought about by clear-felling and burning practices.

Formal qualities of the diptych are geometrically abstract. The works are pared down to their essential nature. Though, there is some spillage at the sides of *Forest Blanket*: the rectangles are not quite completely contained. The black rectangle of charcoal and the composition of rectangles of wool are both sitting on low plinths, not unlike tombstones.

Relics, the work on the other side of the space consists of a series of specimen containers[98] holding tree fragments. Like relics, the fragments lay in the container, as memories of times gone by.

The placing of the works within the space and the dim lighting have been carefully considered to give the work a solemn tomb-like atmosphere.

Contemplation

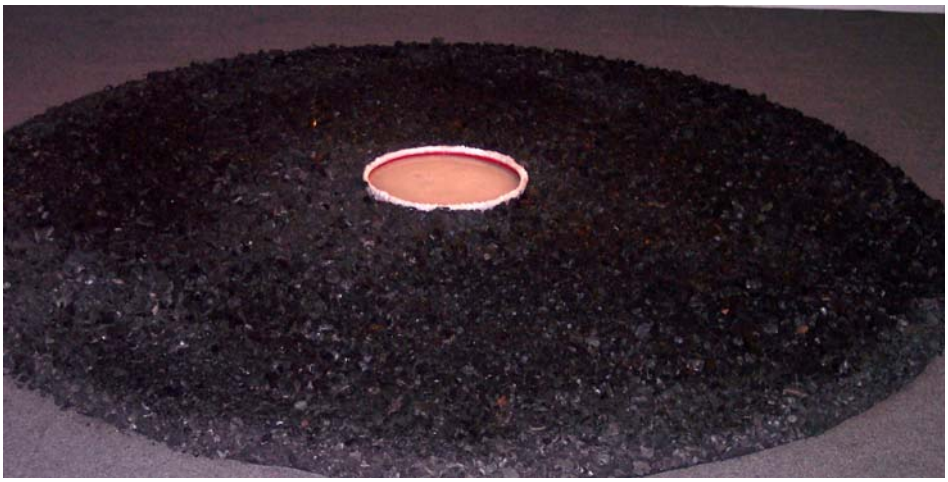
This work I originally made for the Design Centre exhibition. Here the trees are neither young nor very old. They have an air of contemplation, like silent witnesses they stand and watch life go by.

30 Days in the Bush

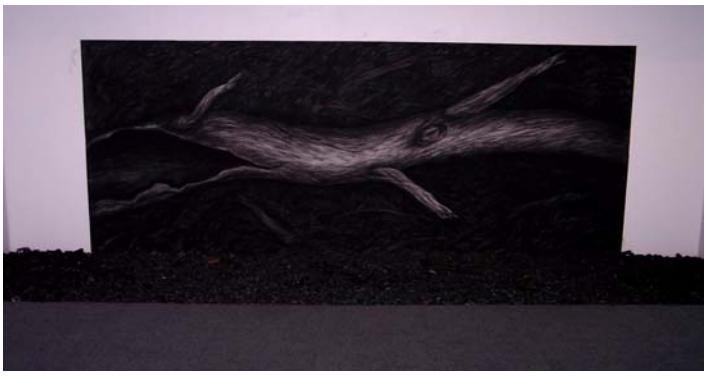
The thirty pieces of wool have been dyed over a thirty-day period. The materials used for dyeing the wool were sourced from different trees on my bush block. The colours reflect the biodiversity of the forest. The 42 acres of bush were previously part of a larger sheep farm. Blocks in the neighbourhood have been cleared for urbanisation and paddocks.

The woollen rags make reference to the sheep and also the tradition of putting rags in trees as offerings to the gods and as prayers for better health. This practice was common in Europe in previous centuries and is still practised in some other parts of the world. The thirty rags become a diary, an inventory of the life of the trees on my block. They also refer to the female cycle of life.

[98] These antique containers were used at the Australian Museum to store seeds in.



59, *Nemeton*, (left, detail)



60, *Resting Place*, (right) *Tree of Life*

61. *Tomb: Forest Blanket* and *Death Blanket*
Right: *Relics*

62. *Sanctuary*, (right: detail)

63. *30 days in the Bush* (right, detail)

CONCLUSION

'Man's perception of nature is determined by his own culture'.[98]

The theoretical research I have completed for this project, *The Sacred Tree,* has taken me on an historical journey. The research has inquired into perceptions and depictions of trees from primeval times to the Medieval and Romantic eras in Europe as well as attitudes towards trees in colonial Australia, arriving at the ways by which contemporary artists view nature and express their concerns for it.

A great many of those artists who over time, have depicted trees and the forest, have generally been motivated by their spiritual ideas. These ideas have varied from Paganism, Christian doctrines and Eastern-inspired theories such as Theosophy, to more postmodernist views often inspired by Buddhism and Shamanism. What all these artists have in common is a reverence for the mysteries of creation and a great respect for nature. Moreover, regardless of growing materialism and the nature/culture divide, the contemporary artists whose work I have explored express a great concern for nature and fear for its destruction. Some of them work in a figurative way, while others use abstraction to project their message, or they combine both visual languages in an eclectic art practice. All use their art in a symbolic way and show through it their concern for the state of the environment.

My work is built upon this reverence for nature. Thus I am concerned at the destruction of nature, in particular the disappearance of the old growth forests. I have used a variety of techniques and styles to create a symbolic language to express my ideas about life, death and regeneration by using the tree as a metaphor.

From early on in the project I have set out to refer to different aspects of the tree and to use the actual substance of trees for my works. The use of a combination of pictorial narrative drawings and the abstract installations

[98] Quote from the exhibition Wereld, Natuur, Kunst, Staatsbosbeheer in De Nieuwe Kerk, 2005, Amsterdam

and dyed works is incidental and came out of explorations that involved using materials from the tree. It gave me the freedom to combine abstraction and figuration. Not feeling confined to either the use of figuration or to the strict rules of transcendental abstraction, I have combined both languages into my own symbols, where image and material are of equal importance.

To produce the works I have drawn from memories of my childhood in Europe: my early feelings of wonder experienced in nature, as well as in the rich environments of grottoes, churches and cathedrals containing narrative paintings which carry a long- standing cultural history. Evocations of these environments are often combined with imagery of a more a transcendental, abstracted nature, carved in stone or woven and embroidered on rich textiles. The mysterious lighting of candles or light falling through the windows often illuminates these environments. This Catholic cultural background is combined with an interest in Eastern philosophical traditions, which also inspired modernists such as Mondrian and contemporary artists such as Wolfgang Laib.

I have combined these feelings, interests and memories with my experiences of nature in Tasmania. The diversity of the forest environment, and its discernible cycle of life, death and regeneration, has been an inspiration to the work as well as the source for my materials.

Some works relate to a contemporary revival of drawing and of romantic idealism. Others link ancient traditions of sewing and dyeing with contemporary art practice. All of the works have involved a ritual element, manifesting itself either in the collecting of materials or in their execution, or both. Techniques of layering and the use of texture in the works are important, as is use of the narrative image. These, together with the material of the trees, ground the work in the ‘real’, the material world. The charcoal drawings help to create a dialogue between nature and culture.

The materials used imbue the work with a sense of the life of the tree. Through their use the work displays a limited and mainly subdued palette

of colours. Apart from the utilization of materials from the tree, a common thread through the works selected for the exhibition is the use of space to create areas for contemplation. This has been achieved through consideration of the placement of works, as well as through lighting.

The combination of different visual languages brings together parallels that relate to my own eclectic lifestyle and split cultural background. Within their symbolism, they reflect a duality and complement each other in the tension between order and the expression of emotion.

The works in the final exhibition have also achieved the initial aims of creating environments in which the viewer is encouraged to contemplate life, death and regeneration through the metaphor of the tree.

The investigations made me aware of many like-minded artists who are concerned with the environment. The works I have made during the course of the research have been varied and add a personal view to current concerns about the forests and their role on this planet. The outcomes have opened up new avenues that no doubt will inform my future arts practice. They have made me realise the enormous scope of further possibilities.

APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

Dye Extraction Process

The method of extracting dyes is a very ancient process. Fabrics found on some of the most ancient human remains are coloured with natural dyes derived from plant material, animals or minerals. In some cultures dyeing was considered to be a magical process. This process stayed virtually unchanged until synthetic dyes were invented during the middle of the 19th century.

Leaves, flowers and bark are collected from native trees on my land or from the surrounding bush. Suitable materials include parts of Native Cherry, Eucalyptus, Wattle and Blackwood. These are prepared by removing the leaves and flowers from their branches or by cutting bark into about 10 cm long pieces. When the weather is not too dry, I light a fire outside and cook my pickings in the large containers on the bonfire. When the weather is not suitable I work in my studio.

After several hours of extracting the dyestuff from the plant material through boiling it in water, a mordant is added to the brew. (Mordants are substances which are used to make the dyes adhere to the fabric; they can be, for example, alum, copper or ferrous sulphate.) The brew is further boiled for another hour and then the fabric or paper is added to it and left to steep for some hours - or at times days or weeks - in order to achieve depth of colour. At times I roll or fold the fabric or tie leaves into it, or I press leaves between sheets of paper and let them steep for weeks in dye baths.

One bucket of leaves dyes one to two squares of my woollen material or one sheet of drawing paper. The process takes between four to eight hours.

Different tones of colour result depending on the source materials, the mordant, amount of time boiled and the material on which the dyes are used. Iron produces darker tones, alum brighter and more yellow ones and copper results in mid brown and greenish tones.

The process of dyeing with these natural dyes brings up memories of ancient times, alchemical processes. There is a ritual and performance element to it. The process encompasses the sense of touch, sight, smell and sound: of evocative sounds of walking through the bush or of the crackling fire. When working indoors this process fills the whole house with strong aromas, which can linger for days.

APPENDIX 3

List of works presented for examination

Sanctuary: Installation, 2006
Drawing: charcoal on paper
Circle; earth, oak bark, acorns, moss, ferns, dimensions variable.

Tomb: Installation, 2006
Forest blanket (2): natural dyes on wool, plinth, W 160cm x L 200cm x W16cm
Death blanket: charcoal on plinth, W 160cm x L 200cm x W16cm
Relics : tree fragments, specimen containers.

Resting Place, Tree of Life: Installation, 2005/2006
Tree of Life: charcoal on paper, H 300cm x W 75cm.
Resting Place: charcoal on paper, 150 cm H x W 341 cm
Floor piece: Charcoal and seeds, dimensions variable.

30 days in the bush: Installation, 2006
Natural dyes on 30 pieces of wool, dimensions variable.

Nemeton**:** Installation, 2006
Charcoal, salt, water, metal basin, dimensions variable.

Contemplation: 2005
Charcoal on paper, H 210 cm x W 71 cm

APPENDIX 4

List of Illustrations

CHAPTER I: AIMS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. *Our Lady of the Oak*, at Meerveldhoven, Brabant.
Scanned from: Holsbeke, Mireille, editor, *The Object as Mediator, on the Transcendental Meaning of Art in Traditional Cultures*, Antwerp, Belgium, Etnografish Museum Antwerp, 1996. p. 20.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

2. Adam Mc Lean, Symbol of the tree.
Scanned from: Francis Melville, The book of Alchemy, Australia, Gary Allen Pty Ltd, 2002, front cover.

3. Green Man, Marburg.
Scanned from: Anderson, William, *Green man, the Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth*, London, Glasgow, Sydney, Johannesburg, Harper Collins, 1990. p.64.

4. Verdant Cross, Rotschild-kantieken, Terwaan,c.1300
Smeyers, Maurits, *Vlaamse Miniaturen*, Leuven, Uitgeverij Davidsfonds. 1998. p.132

5**.** Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp, Belgium.
Scanned from: Rottier, Honore, *Rondreis door Middeleeuws Vlaanderen*, Leuven Uitgeverij Davidsfonds, p. 155.

6.Sainte-Chapelle, Paris
Photo: Chantale Delrue

7. Shrine, Belgium.
Photo: Chantale Delrue

CHAPTER II: CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

8.Albrecht Altdorper, *St George and the Dragon*, 1510, oil on parchment attached to panel, 28.2 x 22.5, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Scanned from Wood, Christiopher S., Albrecht Altdoroher and the origins of landscape, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1993. p. 132.

9. Caspar David Friedrich, *Chasseur in the forest*, 1813-14, private collection, Bielefeld.

Scanned from: Koerner, Joseph,Leo, *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape*, London,Uk: Reaktion Books Ltd, (First print 1990) reprint 1995, p152

10. Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape with Church,*1811, National Gallery, London.

Scanned from: Koerner, Joseph,Leo, *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape*, London,Uk: Reaktion Books Ltd, (First print 1990) reprint 1995. p.22.

11. Mondrian, *The Grey Tree*, 1912, Oil on canvas, 78,5 x 107,5 cm. Gemeentemuseum, Slijper Collection, The Hague.

Scanned from: Milner, John, *Mondrian*, London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1992, p.98.

12. Piet Mondrian, *Apple Tree in Flower*, 1912, Oil on canvas, 78 x106 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
Scanned from: Milner, John, *Mondrian*, London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1992, p.99.

13. Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue and Black*, 1921, oil on canvas, 59.5 x 59.5 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.
Scanned from Miller, John, *Mondrian*, London, Phaidon Press limited, 1992, p.160.

14. John Glover, *Corroboree of natives in Van Diemen's Land,* 1846, watercolour, 9.5 x 17.1cm, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.
Scanned from: Hanson, David, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, Australia, Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Art Exhibitions Australia, 2003.p.241.

15. John Glover, *Swilker Oak,* 1840, Oil on canvas, 76.0 x 114,5 cm, Collection: Clarendon Homestead, National Trust of Australia, Tasmania.
Scanned from: Hanson, David, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, Australia, Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Art Exhibitions Australia, 2003.p.239.

16. Hans Heysen, *Summer, 1909, watercolour on paper, 56.5 X 78.5 cm*
Radford, Ron, *Our Country, Australian Federation landscapes 1900-1914*, Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2001. P.69.

17. Peter Dombrovskis, *Rock Island Bend,*
Scanned from postcard, West Wind Press, Tasmania.

18,19. Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks, 1996,*
Scanned from,Wallis, Brian, Kastner, Jeffrey, *Land and Environmental Art,* London, Phaidon Press limited, 1998 p.164.

20. Anselm Kiefer, Varus, 1976, oil and acrylic on burlap, 200 x 270 cm.
Scanned from: Arassse, Daniel, *Anselm Kiefer*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2001. p.124.

21. Anselm Kiefer, *Piet Mondrian : Arminius' Battle [Piet Mondrian - Hermannsschlacht],* 1976, (245 x 112,5cms)

Scanned from: López-Pedraza, Rafael, Anselm Kiefer, The Psychology of " After the catastrophe", New York, George Braziller Inc, 1996, p.30.

22. Anselm Kiefer, *Man Laying with Branch*, 1971, Watercolour, gouache, and graphite pencil on paper, 23.8 x 27.3 cm.
Scanned from Rosenthal, Nan, *Anselm Kiefer, Works on Paper in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, p.27.

23. Anselm Kiefer, *Untitled*, 1996, Woodcut, shellac, and acrylic on paper on canvas, 364 x 245 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Scanned from Rosenthal, Nan, *Anselm Kiefer, Works on Paper in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, p.29.

24. Wolfgang Laib, *Sifting pollen from dandelion*, Wolfgang Laib 1982 63 x 81 cm
Scanned from *Wolfgang Laib*, ARC Musee d'Art Moderne De La Ville De Paris, 1986, p. 29.

25. Wolfgang Laib, *Pollen from pine*, Wolfgang Laib 1984, 400 x 500 cm
Scanned from *Wolfgang Laib*, ARC Musee d'Art Moderne De La Ville De Paris, 1986, p.32.

26. Kiki Smith, *Untitled (Roses)*, 1993-94, bronze.
Scanned from Posner, Helaine, *Kiki Smith*, Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Bulfinch Press, Little Brown and Company, 1998, p.123.

27.Kiki Smith, *Peabody (animal Drawings)*,1996, ink on paper, installation view, *Landscape*, Massachusetts college of Art, Boston.
Scanned from Posner, Helaine, *Kiki Smith*, Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Bulfinch Press, Little Brown and Company, 1998, p.161.

28. John Wolseley, *Nov. 28 Different trees drawn by their own Charcoal*,1980, Charcoal, crayon and found ochres on paper, 90 x 78 cm Private collection, photo: Jenni Carter.
Scanned from: Sasha Grishin, *John Wolseley, Land Marks*, Australia, Craftsman House, 1998, p.119

29. John Wolseley, *The environment: a cry of fear*.
Scanned from: *Sasha Grishin, John Wolseley, Land Marks*, 1998, Australia, Craftsman House. p.161.

30. John Wolseley, *Burnie woodchip pile.*
Scanned from: *Sasha Grishin, John Wolseley, Land Marks*, 1998, Australia, Craftsman House. p.160

31. Peter Booth, *Painting*, 1974, synthetic polymer on canvas, 182.9 x 121.9 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Scanned from Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, (cat), Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2003. p.37.

32. Peter Booth, *Untitled,* from a suite of 19 drawings, 1976, gouache and compressed charcoal. National Gallery of Victoria.
Scanned from Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, (cat), Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2003. p.47.

33. Peter Booth, *Daintree,* 1993, oil on canvas, 208 x 305 cm, private collection.
Scanned from Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p.107,

34. Peter Booth, *Drawing (Devastated Daintree landscape*)
Scanned from Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p.104.

35. Peter Booth, *Winter*, 1993, oil on canvas, 203.4 x 369,5 cm
Scanned from postcard, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria.

36. Peter Booth, *Untitled,* (detail), 1999, oil on canvas, 2000 x 400 cm.
Scanned from Smith, Jason, *Peter Booth: Human / Nature*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p.118.

CHAPTER III: HOW THE PROJECT WAS PURSUED
All works in this chapter are by Chantale Delrue

37. *Golden crown*, 2003, copper-foil, metal wire, 35cm diameter.

38. *Oak branches,* 2003, Oak, copper-foil, wool. Dimensions variable.

39,40. *Drawings*, 2003, 75 x 55 cm

41. *Sacred Circle,* 2003, Drawing: charcoal on paper, H 220 x W 150 cm.

42.*Collecting charcoal,* 2003

43. Trial, Fine Art Gallery, University of Tasmania, 2003

44. Process, 2004

45. *Forest Composition,* 2004, H 57 X W 130 cm

46. *Forest Composition,* 2004, H 60 X W 65 cm

47, *Forest Composition,* 2004, H 65 X W75 cm

48. *The Place Where Three Dreams Cross,* exhibition Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, 2005, (3 *forest compositions*)

49. *Forest Blanket, Death Blanket*, 2004, Natural dyes on wool, charcoal, W 160 cm x L 200 cm

50. *Contemplation*, 2005, Charcoal on paper, H 210 cm x W 71 cm

51. *Life*, 2005, Charcoal on paper, H 210 cm x W 71cm

52,53&54.Exhibition Design Centre of Tasmania, 2005

55, *Blood*, 2005,
Drawing: charcoal and pastel H 64cm x W 205 cm
Sculptural installation: wood, dimensions variable.

56, 57, *Life Circle*, Moonah Art Centre 2005, Installation: charcoal, (approx) 9 m diameter and drawings.

CHAPTER IV: THE WORK BEING PRESENTED IN THE EXHIBITION

58. *Sanctuary*, drawing, 2006, Charcoal, on paper, H 145 x W 295cm.

59, *Nemeton*, 2006.
Charcoal salt, metal tray.

60, *Resting Place, Tree of Life*, 2005/2006
Resting place, 2005/2006, drawing/ installation: charcoal on paper, H. 1.45 cm x W 295 cm x 150 cm.
Tree of Life, 2006: Charcoal drawing, H 305 cm X W 70 cm

61, *Tomb*, 2005/2006
Forrest blanket 2: woollen blanket on plinth, H 200cm x W 165cm
Death blanket: charcoal on plinth, H 200cm x W 165cm.
Relics: seeds, specimen containers. Dimensions variable.

62, *Sanctuary*, 2006
Charcoal drawing, W 295cm x H 145 cm.
Circle: earth, water, acorns, oak bark, ferns and moss.

63, *30 days in the bush*, 2005/2006
30 pieces of wool dyed with natural dyes from trees. Dimensions variable.

APPENDIX 5

Curriculum Vitae: Chantale Delrue

QUALIFICATIONS

Currently candidate for Masters in Fine Arts University of Tasmania, finishing June 2006

1988 BA fine arts, majoring in ceramics. TSIT,Launceston .
1978 Dip Education, Antwerp Belgium.
1973 Dip. Painting, Brussels, Belgium
1969 Dip. Interior Architecture, Mechelen, Belgium

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

2005 ***Oerwouden en Eilanden***, Gallery Blokes, Pepingen, Belgium.
Sacred Circle, Design Centre of Tasmania, Launceston.
Wonders, Moonah Art Centre, Moonah.
2004 ***Tree Tales***, Entrepot gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
2003 ***The Sacred Tree***, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart
1995 ***Midlands visitations and other journeys***, Watsons Fine Arts Dealers, Launceston Tasmania.
The journey, Distelfink Gallery, Melbourne.
1993 ***Flying with the Spirit***, Nexus Gallery, Lions Art Centre Adelaide.
1992 ***Illusions***, Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart.
Ceramic Mural, Art House Inc., Launceston.
University of Tasmania, Launceston.
1990 Cockatoo Inc. Launceston, Tasmania.
1989.***Expressions***, Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Devonport, Tasmania.
1988 ***Recent Ceramics***, T.S.I.T., Gallery "B", Launceston, Tasmania.
Memories of the Northern Territory and Japan, Old Bakery, Lane Cove, NSW.
1983 Warrnambool Regional Art Gallery, Victoria.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Involved over 30 group exhibitions in Australia, Indonesia, Japan and Europe.

RESIDENCIES

2006 **National Multicultural Festival,** Canbera
2005 **Moonah Art Centre,** Moonah
2004 **Moonah Art Centre,** Moonah
2000 **Canberra Museum and Art Gallery, ACT.**
1997 **Cowra Festival For International Understanding, Cowra, NSW**
1995 **Launceston General Hospital**
1989 **Ikeda Sister City, Ikeda, Japan.**

COLLABORATIONS AND PROJECTS INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

2004 **- Mountain Festival, Hobart:** ***Shoreline*** artistic director for sculptural installation and performance celebrating life on the Eastern Shore. Collaboration with Mixed Media Productions.
- Mountain Festival, Hobart: ***Invertebrates,*** visual artist for performance on Mount Wellington.

2003 **- *Community Spirits,*** artistic director for installation at St Matthew's Church, Glenorchy.

2002 **- Mountain Festival Hobart,** artistic director for ***Alive on the Mountain,*** performance with the Mountain Orchester, collaboration with Tanya Bosac.

2001 - **Migrant Resource Center, Hobart:** Textile and large-scale puppet project with refugees

2000 **- Mount Nelson community:** ***The Swift Parrot***, mural painting.
- Glenorchy City Council: ***The Works,*** project

1999 **- Creative Living Center:** project for the **Burnie City Lights Festival**.

1997 - Collaboration with **Tasdance,** to commemorate one hundred and fifty years of circus in Australia.
- Visual artist for "*the Journey*" in conjunction with **Ripe Theater**, Launceston.

1995 - Collaboration with **Gambit Theatre**, Launceston.

1994 -*Multicultural wall hanging,* **Migrant Resource Center, Launceston,**
-*Trevallyn Mural*, Trevallyn Primary School, Launceston.

1993 -Collaboration with **Tasdance**, artistic director Tim Newt and composer Steven Leech. for the ***Illuminations II*** performance.

1992 -Collaboration with **Tasdance**, Visual Artist for the first ***Illumination I*** performance.

1988 -Artist, designer for ***Rainbow Serpent***, Project for the Bicentennial Commission.

1986 - Visual Artist for the **Teenage Road Show** working on Arts projects in Aboriginal and outback communities in NSW, Queensland and the NT.

1985 -Artist director mural, *Alice in Wonderland,* Launceston General Hospital.

SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMISIONS

2004 **Strahan Medical Centre, Strahan,** work on paper, commission trough Arts for Public Buildings.

2003 Mosaic wall project for the **National Europe Centre** at the Australian National University, ACT.

2002 **Australian National University,** sculpture garden
'Evolution/Involution' mosaic pavement.

2001 **Federation Project,** commission for Glenorchy City Council, mosaics for footpath on Main Road.

2000 **Westbury Primary School:** for mosaics for school entrance.

1999 **Devonport City Council:** Gateway to Tasmania mosaic walls for the entrance of Muray street.

1998 **Devonport High School:** mosaics for the entrance foyer of the school.
Burnie City Council: Commission of series of banners.
Cowra Festival For International Understanding: commission of 'Mie Katoen' Belgian Giant .

1996 **Fairvieuw Primary School, New Norfolk:** mosaic floor for foyer.

1995 **Reece High School, Devonport:** mosaic floor for foyer.
Lilydale High School: ceramic vessel and oil painting for school collection.

1994 **Hotel Le Meridien, Noumea:** sculptures for water feature at the entrance of the hotel.

1992 **Nixon Street Primary School:** ceramic mural
Strahan Visitors Centre/Robert Morris Nunn and Associates: Ceramic wall sculpture.

1990 **Ikeda Sister City Committee:** 'Sister City' mural in Ikeda Osaka Japan

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Mansfield, Janet**,** *Ceramics & the Environment,* Crows Nest NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2006, p.184.
- *Claiming Ground: Twenty-five years of Tasmania's Art for Public Buildings Scheme,* Arts Tasmania, Hobart, 2005, p. 46,.
-*The place where three dreams cross,* exhibition catalogue, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 8 – 9.
- Klaosen, Diane, "Chantale Delrue's Mosaics", *Ceramics Technical*, May 2004, pp.41- 44
- Ikin, Robert, "The Journey", *Pottery in Australia*, 1996, Page 59.
- Frost, Annabel, "Images for Contemplation " *Australian Country Style*, July 1995, pp.108-.111.
- Greg Leong, "A Belgian Artist's work in Tasmania", *Artlink,* Vol 12 No 3 Spring 1992, pp. 79 - 80.
- Blair, Charles, "Beyond the Persona", *Craft Arts International* p. 52 - 56 August Oct. 1991, pp. 53 – 56.
- Germaine, Max, *Artists and Galleries of Australia: Vol. One*, Craftsman House, Roseville, 3rd ed. 1990
-*International Leaders in Achievement*, 2nd ed., International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England.
- Backhouse, Sue, *Tasmanian Artists of the Twentieth Century*, Pandami Press, Hobart, 1988 p. 59.
- Schrauwen, Griet, "Chantale Delrue" *Knack Weekend Magazine,* - March 1988. pp. 3 and 28 - 33.
- Deeth, Jane, "Chantale Delrue", *Pottery in Australia*, Volume 27 February 1988. pp 14- 15.
- *Who is Who in Europe,* International Biographical Centre Cambridge, 7th ed, p. 625.
- Morris Nunn, Miranda, "Leading the Parade", *Craft Tasmania*, Volume 16 No. 3 1986. p. 11.

- *Public Art in Launceston*, catalogue of selected sculptures, murals and monuments, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston 1986
- Ernest, Kay, (editor), *Who's Who in Australasia and the Far East*, International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, 1989, p 134.

GRANTS

2005 Arts Bridge Grant, towards exhibition in Belgium
1995 Quick Response Grant, through Arts Tasmania, towards exhibition at Distelfink Gallery in Melbourne.
1993 Pat Corrigan Artist Grant to assist with exhibition at Nexus Gallery in Adelaide
1990 Japan Australian Foundation Grant to do research in Japan
1989 Workshop Development Grant, Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board towards the purchase of equipment.
1988 Bursary from Victorian Ministry for the Arts to attend 'Creative Cities' Melbourne.

AWARDS/ NOMINATIONS

2005 Inaugural Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women, awarded for contributions to the arts.
2002 *Material Girl*, Woman Tasmania, Highly Commended, Drawing Award.
1998 The Apex Club Of Tamar inc.: award for best constructed float.
1997 Cowra's Festival of International Understanding: award for most unique participant.
1995 Multicultural Art for decorative ceramics.
1993 Nominated for the Ross Bower Award, Australia Council for the Arts
1983 Acquisition Award, Footscray City Council.